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The Canterbury Pilgrims

A COMEDY

The MMC Co

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A COMEDY

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

THE TABARD INN

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To

E. H. Sothern

In Friendship

"O KINDLY Muse! let not my weak tongue falter
In telling of this goodly company,
Of their old piety and of their glee;
But let a portion of ethereal dew
Fall on my head, and presently unmew
My soul; that I may dare, in wayfaring,
To stammer where old Chaucer used to sing."

[KEATS: *Endymion.*]

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

I. Characters based on "The Canterbury Tales."

MEN

Geoffrey Chaucer, Poet at King Richard's Court, and Knight of the Shire for Kent.
The Knight (*Dan Roderigo d'Algezir*).
The Squire (*Aubrey*), his son.
The Yeoman, his servant.
The Monk.
The Friar (*Huberd*).
The Merchant.
The Clerk.
The Man-of-Law.
The Franklin.
The Haberdasher, } Members of a Guild.
The Carpenter, }
The Weaver, }
The Dyer, }
The Tapicer, }
The Cook (*Roger Hogge*).
The Shipman (*Jack*).
The Doctor.
The Parson (*Jankin*).
The Ploughman.
The Miller (*Bob* or *Robin*).
The Manciple.
The Reeve.
The Summoner.
The Pardoner.

The Host (*Herry Bailey*).
The Canon's Yeoman.
Joannes, Marcus, Paulus, } The Prioress's Priests.

WOMEN

The Wife of Bath (*Alisoun*).
The Prioress (*Madame Eglantine*).
A Nun, her attendant.
Mistress Bailey, of the Tabard Inn.

II. Characters not based on "The Canterbury Tales."

MEN

Richard II, King of England.
John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, uncle of the King, brother-in-law of Chaucer, and patron of Wycliffe.
The Duke of Gloucester, his brother.
De Vere, Duke of Ireland, Richard's favourite.
The Archbishop of Canterbury.
John Wycliffe, the religious reformer, founder of the "Lollards."
Bottlejohn, Host of the One Nine-pin inn, at Bob-up-and-down.
His Prentices (*Ned* and *Dick*).
A Kitchen-boy.
A Vender of Relics.
Another Vender.
A Black Friar.
A Grey Friar.
A Priest of Canterbury Cathedral.
Heralds.
Choir-boys.

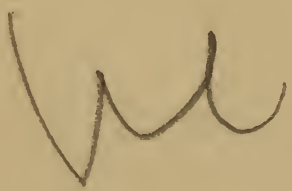
WOMEN

Johanna, Marchioness of Kent.
Canterbury Brooch-girls.
Serving-maids.

Note. — Those designated as Alisoun's "Swains" are the Friar, Cook, Shipman, Miller, Manciple, Summoner, Pardoner.

ACT FIRST

"BIFEL that, in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
To Caunterbury, with ful devout corage,
At night was come in-to that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a companye
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle
In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde."



ACT I

TIME: April 16th, 1387. Late afternoon.

SCENE: The Tabard Inn at Southwark, near London.

When the scene opens, about half of the PILGRIMS *have arrived; the others come in during the first part of the act. Those already arrived are the* MILLER, SHIPMAN, COOK, PARSON, PLOUGHMAN, FRANKLIN, DOCTOR, FRIAR, HABERDASHER, CARPENTER, WEAVER, DYER, TAPICER, CLERK, *and* CHAUCER.

At rise of curtain, the HOST *is just moving to receive the* KNIGHT, SQUIRE, *and* YEOMAN *at the door, back. Chaucer sits with a big volume on his knee in the corner by the fireplace, left; right front, the Miller and the Cook are wrestling, while those near look on.*

COOK

Now, masters, see a miller eat bran!

MILLER

Corpus!

I'd liever wrastle with a butterfly.

SHIPMAN

Tackle him aft.

FRANKLIN

Grip, mon.

[*They clutch each other.*]

A SERVING-MAID

[*Aside to Friar.*]

A diamond pin?

FRIAR

[*Lisps slightly.*]

One of thy glances stickéd through my heart!

[*Offers her the pin.*]

SERVING-MAID

The Master is not looking now.

FRIAR

A bargain?

[*Maid nods, takes the pin, and hurries off to serve at table. Friar follows.*]

HOST

Welcome, Sir Knight!

KNIGHT

Is this the Tabard Inn?

HOST

[*Points through the open door to his swinging sign.*]

Lo yonder, sir, is Herry Bailey's shirt
Flappeth in the wind; and this is Herry himself.

[*Claps his hands for a serving-boy.*]

Knave!

WEAVER

[*Pounds on the table with a jug, while Carpenter tosses dice.*]

Ale, here! Ale!

[*A shout from the pilgrims, front.*]

MILLER

[*Throwing the Cook.*]

Down!

SHIPMAN

Jolly chuck!

COOK

[*Getting to his feet with a bloody nose and fisting.*]

'Sblood! Thou —

FRANKLIN

Hold, Master Cook, sith thou hast licked the platter,
Go now and wash the gravy off thy nose.
Look to him, doctor.

DOCTOR

Here!

FRANKLIN

[*To the Miller.*]

And thou shalt eat
A sop of wine with me. By God, thy hand!

PARSON

[*To Ploughman, drawing him away.*]

He sweareth like Sathanas. Come!

PLOUGHMAN

Toot, brother!
A little swearing saveth from the gallows.

MILLER

[*Laughing at the Cook.*]

His nose is like a tart.

CLERK

[*To Chaucer, feasting his eyes on his book.*]

Grant pardon, sir.
In vanitate humanorum rerum,
I' the world's uproar, 'tis sweet to find a scholar.

CHAUCER

A book's a mistress all the world may love
And none be jilted.

CLERK

Then am I in love.
What is the book?

CHAUCER

A medley, like its master,
Containing many divers characters,
Bound in one hide. Whoso shall read it through
He shall behold Troilus and Launcelot
Sighing in Cæsar's face, and Scaramouche
Painting with grins the back of Aristotle.

CLERK

[*Sparkling.*]

What! — Aristotle?

CHAUCER

[*Rising, hands him the volume.*]

I prithee look it through.

CLERK

Grammercy — somewhat farther from the piping.

[*Draws farther away from the Squire, who is beginning to play a few strains on his flute, in front of the fire.*]

MAN OF LAW

[*Entering with* MERCHANT.]

For this recognisance —

MERCHANT

The ship was wrecked.

MAN OF LAW

Depardieux! Then your property is flotsam
And liable to salvage. Therefore you
Will need me as your man of law.

KNIGHT

[*To Chaucer.*]

I knew
You were a soldier by your bearing, sir.
You were at Cressy?

CHAUCER

Nay, Sir Knight, I played
With tin swords then. Though I have often fought
At Frenchmen's heels, I was but six years old
When our Black Edward won his spurs.

KNIGHT

Runs time
So swiftly? — One and forty years ago!

HOST

[*To a serving-maid.*]

Belive, wench!

FRIAR

[*Stealing a kiss from her.*]

In principio —

HOST

What's here?

MAID

The gentle friar!

HOST

Gentle flower-de-luce!

[*Makes after Friar, who dodges behind* MISTRESS BAILEY.]

MISTRESS BAILEY

[*Shrewishly.*]

Hold, goodman Herry! 'Tis a friend of mine.

[*Host retires; Friar mocks him.*]

KNIGHT

I am returning from the Holy Land
And go to pay my vows at Canterbury.
This is my son.

CHAUCER

Go you to Canterbury
As well, Sir Squire?

[*The Squire, putting down his flute, sighs deeply.*]

KNIGHT

My son, the gentleman
Accosts thee!

SQUIRE

Noble gentleman — Ah me!

[*He turns away.*]

CHAUCER

[*Follows him.*]

My dearest heart and best beloved foe,
Why liketh you to do me all this woe?
What have I done that grieveth you, or said,
Save that I love and serve you, high and low?
And whilst I live I will do ever so.
Wherefore, my sweet, do not that I be dead;
For good and fair and gentle as ye be,
It were great wonder if but that ye had
A thousand thousand servants, good and bad:
The most unworthiest servant — I am he!

SQUIRE

Sir, by my lady's grace, you are a poet
And lover, like myself. We shall be brothers.
But pardon, sir, those verses are not yours.
Dan Chaucer wrote them. Ah, sir, know you Chaucer?

CHAUCER

Twelve stone of him!

SQUIRE

Would *I* did! Is he not
An amorous divinity? Looks he
Like pale Leander, or some ancient god?

CHAUCER

Sooth, he is like old Bacchus round the middle.

SQUIRE

How acts he when in love? What feathers wears he?
Doth he sigh oft? What lady doth he serve?
Oh!

[*At a smile from Chaucer, he starts back and looks at him in awe; then hurries to the Knight. Chaucer walks among the pilgrims, talking with them severally.*]

MILLER

[*To Franklin.*]

Ten gallon ale? God's arms! I take thee.

MAN OF LAW

What's
The wager?

FRANKLIN

Yonder door; this miller here
Shall break it, at a running, with his head.
The door is oak. The stakes ten gallon ale.

SHIPMAN

Ho, then, I bet the miller shall be drunk.

MERCHANT

What bet?

SHIPMAN

Twelve crown upon the miller.

MERCHANT

Done.

[*At the door appears the* PRIORESS, *accompanied by a* NUN *and her three* PRIESTS, *one of whom*, JOANNES, *carries a little pup. The Host hurries up with a reverence.*]

HOST

Welcome, my lady dear. Vouchsafe to enter
Poor Herry Bailey's inn.

PRIORESS

Merci.

HOST

[*To a serving-boy.*]

Knave, show
My lady Prioress to the blue chamber
Where His Majesty, King Richard, slept.

PRIORESS

Joannes,
Mark, Paulus, stay! have you the little hound
Safe?

JOANNES

Yes, my lady.

PRIORESS

Carry him before,
But carefully.

MILLER

[*To Yeoman.*]

Here, nut-head, hold my hood.

YEOMAN

Wilt try bareheaded?

FRIAR

'Mass!

FRANKLIN

Ho, for a skull!
Miller, thou art as tough a knot as e'er
The Devil tied. By God, mine ale is spilled.

[*The priests and Prioress have just reached the door, left front, which the Miller is preparing to ram.*]

PLOUGHMAN

The door is locked.

JOANNES

But, sir, the Prioress —

SHIPMAN

Heigh! Clear the decks!

[*The Miller, with clenched fists, and head doubled over, runs for the door.*]

YEOMAN

Harrow!

PARSON

Run, Robin.

GUILD-MEN

[*Rise from their dice.*]

Ho!

[*With a crash, the Miller's head strikes the door and splits it. At the shock, he rebounds against Joannes, and reaching to save himself from falling, seizes the puppy.*]

MILLER

A twenty devils!

GUILD-MEN

[*All but the Weaver, clambering over the table.*]

Come on!

PLOUGHMAN

[*To the Miller.*]

What aileth thee?

MILLER

The priest hath bit my hand.

JOANNES

Sweet sir, the puppy —
It was the puppy, sir.

MILLER

Wring me its neck.

PRIORESS

Alas, Joannes — help!

MILLER

By Corpus bones!
Give me the cur.

PRIORESS

St. Loy! Will no one help?

CHAUCER

Madame, what may I do?

PRIORESS

My little hound —
The churl — My little hound! The churl will hurt it.
If you would fetch to me my little hound —

CHAUCER

Madame, I'd fetch you Cerberus from hell.

MILLER

Lo, masters! See a dog's neck wrung!

CHAUCER

[*Breaking through the crowd, seizes the Miller by the throat.*]

Which dog's?

MILLER

Leave go! — 'Sdeath! Take the whelp, a devil's name.

CHAUCER

Kneel! Ask grace of this lady here.

MILLER

[*Sullenly.*]

What lady?

CHAUCER

Of her whom gentles call St. Charity
In every place and time. —

[*Turns then towards Prioress.*]

What other name
This lady bears, I have not yet been honoured
With knowing. — Kneel!

MILLER

[*Morosely; kneels.*]

Lady, I axe your pardon.

CHAUCER

Madame, your little hound is safe.

PRIORESS

[*Nestles the little hound with tender effusiveness; then turns shyly to Chaucer.*]

Merci!
My name is Madame Eglantine.

[*Hurries out, left.*]

CHAUCER

[*Aside.*]

Hold, Geoffrey!
Yon beastie's quaking side thumped not as thine
Thumps now. And wilt thou ape a little hound?
Ah, Madame Eglantine, unless ye be
To me, as well as him, St. Charity!

FRANKLIN

Who is the man?

MILLER

The Devil, by his eye.
They say King Richard hath to court a wrastler
Can grip ten men. I guess that he be him.

COOK

Ho! milksop of a miller!

MILLER

[*Seizing him.*]

Say it twice;
What?

COOK

Nay, thou art a bull at bucking doors.

FRANKLIN

Let ribs be hoops for twenty gallon ale
And stop your wind-bags. Come.

MILLER

[*With a grin, follows the Franklin.*]

By Corpus bones!

SHIPMAN

Twelve crown.

MERCHANT

Twelve, say you? See my man of law.

WEAVER

[*Springs to his feet.*]

The throw is mine!

DYER

A lie! When we were away
You changed the dice!

WEAVER

My throw was cinq and three.

DYER

A lie! Have it in your gullet!

[*Draws his knife. They fight.*]

CARPENTER

Part them!

TAPICER

Back!

HOST

Harrow! Dick Weaver, hold! Fie, Master Dyer,
Here's not a dyeing stablishment; we want
No crimson cloth — Clap hands now: Knave, more ale.

CHAUCER

[*To the Doctor.*]

If then, as by hypothesis, this cook
Hath broke his nose, it follows first that we
Must calculate the ascendent of his image.

DOCTOR

Precisely! Pray proceed. I am fortunate
To have met a fellow-doctor at this inn.

CHAUCER

Next, treating him by magic natural,
Provide him well with old authorities,
As Esculapius, Diescorides,
Damascien, Constantinus, Averrois,
Hippocrates, Serapion, Razis,
Bernardus, Galienus, Gilbertinus —

DOCTOR

But, sir, the fellow cannot read —

CHAUCER

Why, true;
Then there remains but one sure remedy,
Thus: bid him, fasting, when the moon is wane,
And Venus rises in the house of Pisces,
To rub it nine times with a herring's tail.

DOCTOR

Yea, Pisces is a fish. — I thank you, sir.

[*He hurries off to the Cook, whose nose he has patched.*]

HOST

[*To the Reeve, who enters.*]

God save thee, Osewold! What's o'clock? Thou look'st
As puckered as a pear at Candlemas.

REEVE

There be too many folk i' the world; and none
Is ripe till he be rotten.

[*Sits at table.*]

Penny'orth ale!

SQUIRE

My lord, father!

KNIGHT

Well, son?

SQUIRE

[*Looking at Chaucer.*]

Sir, saw you ever
So knightly, sweet, and sovereign a man,
With eyes so glad and shrewdly innocent?
O, when I laid my hand in his, and looked
Into his eyes, meseemed I rode on horse
Into the April open fields, and heard
The larks upsinging in the sun. Sir, have
You guessed who 'tis?

KNIGHT

To judge him by his speech,
Some valiant officer.

SQUIRE

Nay, *I* have guessed.

[*A merry jingling of bells outside. Enter the Monk, holding up a dead swan.*]

MONK

Soft! Handle not the fat swan. Give it me.
Bailey, I'll learn thy cook to turn a spit.
[*Exit, right. Enter, left, Joannes.*]

CHAUCER

[*To Ploughman.*]

Aye, man, but weather is the ploughman's wife
To take for worse or better. If thy loam
Be thin, and little snow, which is the best
Manure, then thou must dung thy furrows twice
'Twixt Michelmas and March.

PLOUGHMAN

Aye, but —

JOANNES

Sir Knight,
This letter . . .

CHAUCER

What! from whom?

PLOUGHMAN

Toot! Canst thou read, mon?

JOANNES

This letter, sir, my Lady Prioress —

CHAUCER

From Madame Eglantine? Waits she an answer?

JOANNES

So please you, sir.

CHAUCER

Sweet saints!

[*Takes the letter and reads, aside.*]

PLOUGHMAN

[*Watches Chaucer curiously*].

Aye, 'e can read it.

[*Outside, is heard the distant voice of the Wife of Bath* (ALISOUN), *joined in chorus by the* PARDONER, MANCIPLE, *and* SUMMONER, *singing.*]

ALISOUN

When folk o' Faerie
Are laughing in the laund,
And the nix pipes low in the miller's pond,
Come hither, love, to me.

[*Chorus.*]

With doe and with dove,
Come back to your love.
Come hither, love, to me.

CHAUCER

[*Reading the Prioress's letter, as the song outside sounds nearer.*]

"Monsieur l'inconnu Chevalier —

These greetings shall apprise you that the little hound is convalescent, and now suffereth from nothing save a sore necessity for nourishment. Wherefore, being cast in holy pilgrimage upon this revelous inn, I appeal once more, gentil monsieur, to your honourable chivalry, of which I beseech you this favour, to wit; that you shall see prepared and delivered into the hands of Joannes, my priest, a recipe as follows: —

One ounce of wastel-bread, toasted a pleasant brown;
One little cup of fresh milk;
Soak the former in the latter, till the sand-glass shall be run half out;
Then sprinkle sparingly with sweet root of beet, rubbed fine.
Serve neatly.

MADAME EGLANTINE."

SHIPMAN

[*At the door, to Friar, who is starting to flirt with a third serving-maid.*]

Hist! Who's yon jolly Nancy riding here,
With them three tapsters tooting up behind?

FRIAR

By sweet St. Cuthbert!

SHIPMAN

Ha! ye ken the wench.

FRIAR

The wench? Oho! Thou sayest well. List, sir;
List, gentle Mariner! Thy wench hath been
A five times wedded and five hundred woo'd;
Hath rode alone to sweet Jerusalem
And back more oft than Dick-the-Lion's-Heart;
And in her right ear she is deaf as stone,
Because, she saith, that once with her right ear
She listened to a lusty Saracen.
She was not born a-yesterday, yet, by
The merry mass, when she comes in the door,
She maketh sweet-sixteen as stale as dough.

SHIPMAN

She looks a jolly Malkin. What's her name?

FRIAR

Dame Alisoun, a cloth-maker of Bath.

CHAUCER

[*Reading.*]

"P.S. Let not the under-side be toasted as brown as the upper.
P.P.S. The milk should not be skimmed."

[*Laughs to himself.*]

"A little cup of milk and wastel-bread!"
Haha!—A gentle heroine for a tale!
My heart is lost.

[*To Joannes, who is trembling at the Miller.*]

What, fellow, art thou scared?
Come with me to the kitchen.

JOANNES

[*Follows timidly.*]

Ben'cite! [*Exeunt.*]

[*Outside the song, "Come hither, Love," bursts into chorus. Enter the* WIFE OF BATH, *astride a small white ass, which is fancifully caparisoned like a fairy creature. Spurs jingle on the Wife's boots, and on her head is a great round hat. Followed by the* SUMMONER, PARDONER, *and* MANCIPLE, *she rides into the middle of the floor and reins up.*]

ALISOUN

Whoa-oop! — God save this merry company!

[*A commotion.*]

By God, I ween ye ken not what I am:
I am the jolly elf-queen, and this is
My milk-white doe, whereon I ride as light
As Robin Good-boy on a bumble-bee;

[*Indicating the ass's ears.*]

These be his wings. —
And lo — my retinue!
These here be choir-boys from Fairy-land.
Come, Pardoner, toot up my praise anon.

PARDONER AND ALISOUN [*sing*]

When sap runs in the tree,
And the huntsman sings "Halloo!"
And the greenwood saith: "Peewit! Cuckoo!"
Come hither, love, to me.

SWAINS AND ALISOUN

With turtle and plover,
Come back to your lover.
Come hither, love, to me.

ALISOUN

Now, lads, the chorus!

[*The Swains and Alisoun, joined by several other pilgrims, repeat chorus.*]

MILLER

Nails and blood! Again!

FRIAR

Encore!

ALISOUN

Nay lads, the song hath dried my whistle.
The first that fetches me a merry jug
Shall kiss my lily-white hand.

[*The Swains, with a shout, scramble to get ale of the tapster.*]

SWAINS

Here, ale here! ale!

HOST

Slow, masters! Turtle wins the rabbit race.

MILLER

[*Offers his tankard, tipsily.*]

Give's thy hand, girl.

ALISOUN

Thou art drunk! 'Tis empty.

MILLER

Well, 'tis a jug. Ye said "a merry jug."

ALISOUN

Pardee! I'll keep my word.

MILLER

[*Grinning, raises his face to her.*]

A kiss?

ALISOUN

A smack!

[*Flings the tankard at his head.*]

MILLER

[*Dodging it.*]

Harrow!

THE OTHER SWAINS

[*Pell-mell.*]

Here! here! Take mine!

FRIAR

Drink, sweet Queen Mab!

[*Re-enter Chaucer and Joannes. Chaucer carries in his hand a crock.*]

ALISOUN

[*To the Friar.*]

What, Huberd, are ye there? Ye are too late,
All o' ye! The elf-queen spies her Oberon.

[*Wheeling the ass to confront Chaucer.*]

By God, sir, you're the figure of a man
For me. — Give me thy name.

CHAUCER

Your Majesty,
This is most sudden. Dare I hope you would
Have me bestow my humble name upon you?

ALISOUN

Make it a swap, mon. Mine is Alisoun,
And lads they ken me as the Wife of Bath!

CHAUCER

My name is Geoffrey. When the moon is full,
I am an elf and skip upon the green;
By my circumference fairy-rings are drawn,
And lasses ken me as the Elvish Knight.

SQUIRE

[*Aside.*]

Father, 'tis he — the poet laureate!

KNIGHT

Brother-in-law to John of Gaunt?

SQUIRE

The same.

SHIPMAN

[*Offers his mug again.*]

Take this, old girl.

ALISOUN

The devil take a tar.

[*Snatches the crock from Chaucer's hand.*]

I'll take a swig from Geoffrey's. — Holy Virgin!
What pap is this here? Milk and wastel-bread?

CHAUCER

Nay, 'tis a kind of brew concocted from
The milky way, to nurse unmarried maids.

ALISOUN

[*Hands it back quickly.*]

Saints! None o' that for me.

CHAUCER

[*Aside to Joannes.*]

Bear it to your mistress.

ALISOUN

[*Aside.*]

Mistress? Aha! — A woman in the case.

[*Aloud.*]

Give us your hand, Sir Knight o' the Wastel-bread,
And help me light adown. —
What! Are ye afeared
To take me in your arms?

CHAUCER

Sweet Alisoun,
Thou art a vision of the ruddy Venus
Bright pommelled on the unspotted Pegasus,
And I am Ganymede, thy stable boy.
[*He helps her to alight.*]

ALISOUN

Well swung! What think ye of my jolly heft?

CHAUCER

Thou art a very dandelion seed
And I thy zephyr.

MILLER

[*To the Swains.*]
'Sblood! He steals our wench.

SQUIRE

[*Approaching Chaucer diffidently, speaks under his breath.*]
Great Master Chaucer.

CHAUCER

Hush! Speak not my name.
[*Takes the Squire aside.*]

ALISOUN

Halloa! what's struck this jolly company?
Ye're flat as stale ale. Master Summoner, what's
The matter now? Ye should be glad at heart
To wear so merry a bonfire in your face.

SUMMONER

Was it for this I sang, "Come hither, Love"?

COOK

Aye, was it for this?

ALISOUN

What, Roger Hogge, yourself?
How long, bird, have you worn a gallows-warrant
Upon your nose?

[*The others hoot.*]

COOK

As long, Dame Alisoun,
As you have had a hogshead for a sweetheart.

ALISOUN

Geoffrey, ye mean? Ho! Are ye jealous there?

[*To the Shipman.*]

Jack, too, and hast a wife to home at Dartmouth?
Hark, lads! This Jealousy is but a ninny;
For though there be a nine-and-twenty stars,
Yet Jealousy stares only at the moon.
Lo! I myself have made a vow 'twixt here
And holy Thomas' shrine to twig a husband;
But if I like this fellow Geoffrey, can't
I like ye all? By God, give me your fists;
And I will tip ye a secret.

[*Mysteriously.*]

I am deef!
Ye ken all great folks have some great defect:
Cupid is blind and Alisoun is deef;
But Cupid — he can wink the t'other eye,
And Alis — she can ope the t'other ear.

FRIAR

Sweet Alis, which is deaf?

ALISOUN

I said, the t'other.

FRIAR

Nay, but which ear, the right or left?

ALISOUN

Love, if
Ye guess the right ye won't be left: how's that?
So, fellows, ye can knock at either door;
And while Tom standeth scraping the front mat,
By God then, Dick, go rap at the side porch;
The t'other door is locked; I say not which.

[*Laughing and boxing their ears as they try, in turn, to whisper to her, she leads them to the ale-barrel, where they drink.*]

FRIAR

Sweet brethren, drink with me to t'other ear!

ALISOUN

Here's pot-luck to you all, lads!

PARDONER

[*Who has spread out his relics in another part of the room.*]

Pardons! pardons!
Offer your nobles now; spoons, brooches, rings:
Radix malorum est cupiditas.

CHAUCER

[*Aside to Squire.*]

Pray, speak no word of who I am. I ride
To Canterbury now, to bid farewell
My kinsman, John of Gaunt. But on the road,
I travel here incognito.

SQUIRE

But, sir,
At least, beseech you, let me guard your person;
So mean an inn, such raw folk, must offend
King Richard's royal poet.

CHAUCER

Not so, lad.
To live a king with kings, a clod with clods,
To be at heart a bird of every feather,
A fellow of the finch as well as the lark,
The equal of each, brother of every man:
That is to be a poet, and to blow
Apollo's pipe with every breath you breathe.
Therefore, sweet boy, don't label me again
In this good company.

SQUIRE

I will not, sir —

[*Aside.*]

A god! A very god!

PARDONER

Here's relics! pardons!
Offer your nobles now; spoons, brooches, rings!
Lordings, step up! Pardons from Rome all hot.

[*A crowd gathers round him.*]

PARSON

[*Lifting a relic.*]

What's this?

PARDONER

That, master, is the shoulder-bone
Of a sheep once slaughtered by a holy Jew.
Take heed, lordings, take heed! What man is here
That hath to home a well?

SEVERAL

I! I!

PARDONER

Pay heed!
Let any man take this same shoulder-bone
And chuck it in his well, and if he own
A cow, or calf, or ass, which hath the pox,
Take water from that well, and wash its tongue.
Presto! It shall be well again.

PLOUGHMAN

[*To the Parson.*]

By Mary,
I'll try it on Mol.

PARDONER

Hark, lordings, what I say!
If also the goodman that owns the beasts
Shall, fasting, before cock-crow, drink three draughts
Of that same well, his store shall multiply.

PARSON

My word!

FRANKLIN

Nay, that's worth while.

PARDONER

List what I say!
Also, if any wife shall boil a broth
Of this same bone, it healeth jealousy.

ALISOUN

Ho! give it me! And every fellow here
Shall suck the marrow-bone.

PARDONER

What will you offer?

ALISOUN

[*Throws a kiss.*]

That's all ye get o' me.

PARSON

I'll give a florin.

PARDONER

Done, Master Parson. Listen, lordings, list!
This is a piece o' the sail St. Peter had
When he walked on the sea; and lo! this cloth —

ALISOUN

A pillow-case!

PARDONER

This is the Virgin's veil.
And in this crystal glass behold —

ALISOUN

Pig's bones!

[*Slaps Chaucer on the shoulder.*]

What, Geoffrey lad! Which will ye liever kiss,
A dead saint's bones, or a live lass — her lips?

[*Enter, L., the Prioress.*]

CHAUCER

Why, Alisoun, I say all flesh is grave-clothes,
And lips the flowers that blossom o'er our bones;
God planted 'em to bloom in laughter's sunshine
And April kissing-showers.

[*Laughing, he kisses Alisoun and faces the Prioress.*]

St. Charity!

ALISOUN

Haha! That time I had thee on the rump.

[*She calls the Friar aside, R.*]

PRIORESS

[*Starting to go.*]

Je vous demande pardong, Monsieur.

CHAUCER

Madame,
Qu'est ce que je puis faire pour elle?

PRIORESS

Rien, rien.

CHAUCER

Madame, mais si vous saviez comme je meurs
De vous servir —

PRIORESS

You speak patois, Monsieur;
I studied French in Stratford-at-the-Bowe.

CHAUCER

Your accent is adorably — unique.

PRIORESS

[*Is about to melt, but sees Alisoun.*]
And you a gentilhomme — at least I thought so
Whenas you saved my little hound — Ah, sir!

CHAUCER

Adam was our first father: I'm her brother.

PRIORESS

You meant no more?

CHAUCER

Her brother and your servant,
Madame. And for the rest, I ride to Canterbury:
I will absolve me at St. Thomas' shrine.

PRIORESS

[*Eagerly.*]

Go you to Canterbury?

CHAUCER

With the rest.

PRIORESS

Oh! I am glad — that is, I came to ask you.
Know you, Monsieur, where lies upon the way
A little thorp men call Bob-up-and-down?

CHAUCER

Right well — we pass it on the road.

PRIORESS

We do?
Merci.

[*Going.*]

MILLER

[*Amid uproar, drinks to Alisoun.*]

Lend me thy t'other ear.

[*Startled, the Prioress returns to Chaucer. Behind them, the Friar, at a sign from Alisoun, listens unobserved.*]

PRIORESS

You see —
I expect to meet my brother on the road.
He is returning from the Holy Land;
I am to meet him at the One Nine-pin,
A tavern at Bob-up-and-down. But —

CHAUCER

But?

PRIORESS

I have not seen him since I was a child.
I have forgotten how he looks.

CHAUCER

He is
Returning from the Holy Land?

PRIORESS

And has
His son with him, for squire. He is a knight.

CHAUCER

[*Aside, looking at the Knight and Squire.*]

A son — his squire? Good Lord!

PRIORESS

And so, Monsieur,
I'm boldened by your courtesy to ask
Your help to find him at Bob-up-and-down,
Till which — your kind protection on the road.

[*More uproar, R.*]

CHAUCER

But —

PRIORESS

Have I asked too much?

CHAUCER

Madame, I am honoured.

[*Hesitatingly.*]

How, then, am I to recognise your brother?

PRIORESS

He wears a ring, on which is charactered
The letter "A," and after, writ, in Latin,
The same inscription as is fashioned here
Upon my brooch. I may not take it off,
For I did promise him to wear it always.
But look, sir, here's the motto. Can you read it?

[*She extends her hand, from the bracelet of which dangles a brooch. The Friar draws nearer.*]

CHAUCER

I thank you.

[*Reads.*]

"Amor vincit omnia."

[*Looking at her.*]

"Love conquers all."

PRIORESS

C'est juste, Monsieur. Adieu!

[*Exit, L.*]

FRIAR

[*Making off to Alisoun.*]

Hist! "Amor vincit omnia," Sweet Alis!

[*After talking aside with Alisoun he goes to the Knight.*]

CHAUCER

[*Aside, looking at the Knight and Squire.*]

A morning's canter to Bob-up-and-down!
"Till which — my kind protection on the road."
When last they met, she was a little child;
Besides, I will make verses for his son.

A morning's canter — time, the month of April —
Place, Merry England — Why not Lord Protector
Geoffrey? Her brother! What's a suit of armor?
Nay! "Amor vincit omnia."

[*Turns away.*]

FRIAR

[*To the Knight, whose finger-ring he examines.*]

How quaint, sir!
A crownèd "A" and underneath a motto.

KNIGHT

Quite so.

FRIAR

Merci!

[*Returns quickly to Alisoun.*]

ALISOUN

Her brother — the One Nine-pin?

FRIAR

To-morrow.

ALISOUN

Good.

FRIAR

Sweet Alisoun — my pay?

ALISOUN

Saith holy Brother Huberd? Love's reward
Is service.

[*Aside, eyeing Chaucer, who passes her.*]

Corpus Venus! What a figure!
I'll woo him. Ay; but first to rid me of
These other fellows.

[*To the Friar.*]

Hist!

In Peggy's stall —
Peggy's my milk-white doe — in Peggy's stall,
Thou'lt find another jolly beggar, waits
To dun me.

FRIAR

Ho! A rendezvous?

ALISOUN

A trysting.
Go, for my love, and play the wench for me,
And nab him by the ears until I come.

FRIAR

St. Cupid, I am game. In Peggy's stall?

[*Exit.*]

[*Alisoun whispers aside individually to the Shipman and Manciple, who exeunt at different doors.*]

CARPENTER

Sack? Sack in the cellarage?

WEAVER

Come on, let's tap it.

[*Exeunt with a number of others.*]

SUMMONER

[*At table, trying to rise.*]

Qu — questio quid juris?

COOK

Now he's drunk
You'll get no more from him but "hic, hac, hoc."

ALISOUN

[*Aside to the Miller.*]

And hold him till I come.

MILLER

In Peggy's stall?
His ears shall be an ell long! — Pull his ears!

[*Exit.*]

CLERK

[*Dazedly to Chaucer, returning him his book.*]

I thank you, sir. Is this the Tabard Inn?
So then I'm back again. Such mighty voyages
The mind sails in a book!

[*He walks slowly forth into the air. Chaucer sits again by the fireplace, with the book on his knees.*]

ALISOUN

[*Aside to the Cook.*]

Hold fast, and wait.

COOK

In Pĕggy's stall?

ALISOUN

Aye.

COOK

Ears for nose, Bob Miller.

[*Exit.*]

CHAUCER

[*Aside.*]

In Peggy's stall,
"Love conquers all."

[*Except for the drunken Summoner, Alisoun and Chaucer are now alone.*]

ALISOUN

[*To the Summoner, lifting his head from the table.*]

Ho, cockerel! Perk up thy bill.

SUMMONER

Quid juris?

ALISOUN

Cluck! Cluck! How pretty Red-comb chucketh. Hark!

[*Throwing her arms round his neck, she whispers in his ear.*]

SUMMONER

A pax! What did a' say? A pax upon him.
A' said a'd pull my ears — in Peggy's stall?
By questio! a brimstone-cherub — me!

[*Rising.*]

Quid juris! Blood shall spurt. By quid! His nose
Shall have a pax. By nails! A bloody quid!

[*Seizing up from the table a round loaf for a shield and a long loaf for a sword, he reels out.*]

ALISOUN

[*Laughing.*]

So, Peggy, they shall woo thy lily-white hoof,
While Alisoun doth keep her rendezvous.

[*Comes over to Chaucer.*]

Ho, candle! Come out from thy bushel.

CHAUCER

[*Peering over the edge of his book.*]

Nay,
'Tis a dark world to shine in; I will read.

ALISOUN

A book! Toot! My fifth husband was a clerk;
He catched more learning *on* his head than in it.
What is't about?

CHAUCER

The wickedness of woman.

ALISOUN

A man, then, wrote it. If you men will write,
We wives will keep ye busy. Read's a snack.

CHAUCER

[*Pretending to read.*]

"Whoso that builds his mansion all of mallows,
Whoso that spurs his blind horse over the fallows,
Whoso that lets his wife seek shrines and hallows,
Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows."

ALISOUN

Chuck that to another dog. My man is dead.

CHAUCER

[*Imperturbably.*]

"A lovely woman, chaste, is like a rose;
Unchaste, a ring of gold in a sow's nose."

ALISOUN

Lo, what a pretty preaching pardoner!
"Offer your nobles now; spoons, brooches, rings!"
Cork up thy froth, a devil's name! Come, play.

CHAUCER

"Better it is to dwell high on the roof
Than down i' the house where woman wields reproof."
O what a list of ladies! What a world!
Hark, Alisoun! and after thou hast heard,
Repent, and cease to be a woman. Hark!
"Who first obeyed the snake's advice, to thieve
The apple from God's Eden? — Mother Eve."

ALISOUN

That's Adam's whopper. He stole it and hid in's throat:
Feel o' your own; the apple sticks there yet.

CHAUCER

[*Dramatically.*]

"Who from great Samson's brow hath slyly shorn
His strength? Delila, answer to thy scorn.
O Hercules! What woman-shaped chimaera
Gave thee the poisoned cloak? Thy Deianira.
O pate of Socrates! Who from the steepy
Housetop upset the slop-pail? Thy Xantippe!
Yea, speeding her lover through the dark finestra,
Who hath her husband slain, but Clytemnestra!
Thou, too, O Cleopatra — "

ALISOUN

[*Tearing a page out of the book, boxes Chaucer on the cheek.*]

Hold thy gab!
A devil fetch thy drasty book!

CHAUCER

Hold, hold;
Dame Alis! gentle Alisoun—

[*Recovers the torn page.*]

ALISOUN

Hoot-toot!
Are ye so dainty with a dirty parchment
And so slipshod to smirch our reputations?
You men! God's arms! What ken ye of true women?
You stuff one doll and name it Modesty,
And bid her mince and giggle, hang her head
And ogle in her sleeve; another poppet
You make of snow and name St. Innocence:
She sits by moonlight in a silver night-gown
And sighs love-Latin in a nunnery.
By Corpus bones! is not a mare a horse?
A woman is but man; and both one beast—
A lusty animal, for field or harness.
But no! ye sanctify a squeamish mule;
And when an honest wench, that speaks her mind,
Meets a fine lad and slaps him on the buttock,
And says out plat: "Thou art a man: I love thee—"
She is a sinner, and your doll a saint.

CHAUCER

Alis, thou speak'st like one in jealousy.

ALISOUN

Why, Geoffrey, so I am. To tell thee flat,
I'm jealous of thy Lady Prioress.

CHAUCER

Peace, dame. Speak not her name with mine.

ALISOUN

Aye, go it,
Miss Innocence and Master Modesty!
How's that?

CHAUCER

Dame Alisoun, it is enough.

ALISOUN

Why, then, it is enough. Come, lad; clap hands.
I am a bud of old experience,
Whom frost ne'er yet hath nipped. In love, I've danced
The waltz and minuet. Therefore, sweet Geoffrey,
This Prioress wears a brooch upon her wrist.

CHAUCER

Well, what of that?

ALISOUN

Yea, "What of that?" Good soul!
She stops to-morrow at Bob-up-and-down.

CHAUCER

How knowest thou?

ALISOUN

Nay, t'other ear is wise.
At the One Nine-pin she shall meet —

CHAUCER

Her brother.

ALISOUN

What wilt thou bet she goes to meet her brother?

CHAUCER

Why, anything.

ALISOUN

Hear that! As though a veil
Were perfect warrant of virginity.
What wilt thou bet she goeth not to meet
Her leman — aye, her lover?

CHAUCER

Thou art daft.

ALISOUN

Lo, subtle man! He robs a poor wife's wits
To insure his lady's honour.

CHAUCER

Tush, tush, dame.
The very brooch she wears, her brother gave her,
For whose sake she hath even promised never
To take it off.

ALISOUN

Wilt *bet* me?

CHAUCER

Bet away!

ALISOUN

Ho, then, it is a bet, and this the stakes:
If that my Lady Prioress shall give
Yon brooch of gold from off her pretty wrist,
Unto the man whom she expects to meet,
And that same man prove not to be her brother,
Then thou shalt marry me at Canterbury.

CHAUCER

A twenty of thee, dame. But if thou lose
The stakes, then thou shalt kneel a-down and kiss
Yon brooch of gold upon her pretty wrist,
And pray the saints to heal thy jealousy.

ALISOUN

Aye, man, it is a bet; and here's my fist.

CHAUCER

And here's mine, Alis; thou art a good fellow.

[*An uproar outside.*]

What row is this?

ALISOUN

Here comes my rendezvous.

[*Enter in tumult, the Friar, Miller, Cook, Shipman, Summoner, and Manciple, holding fast to one another's ears. They call out, partly in chorus.*]

FRIAR

He's nabbed, sweet Alisoun.

MILLER

Here is the lousel.

SUMMONER

I've got his quids.

COOK

I stalled him.

ALISOUN

Hang fast, hold him!
Ho! fetch him down. [*Laughing.*] O Geoffrey, here's a wooing!

CHAUCER

Yea; "Amor vincit omnia."

ALL THE SWAINS

Here he is!

ALISOUN

Leave go.

[*They let go ears.*]

Where is the knave?

ALL

[*Pointing at one another.*]

There.

ALISOUN

Which one?

ALL

[*Pointing at one another.*]

Him!

ALISOUN

So, so! Hath Peggy jilted all of ye,
That took such pains to grow you asses' ears?
Fie! Peg's a jade — come back to Alisoun;
She'll learn ye the true dance of love.

ALL

The devil!

CHAUCER

Nay, Robin Huberd, Roger — lads, chirk up.
These be the thorny steps of Purgatory
That lead ye to your Beatrice of Bath.
When ye attain unto her t'other ear —

[*They groan.*]

FRIAR

We have attained unto it.

ALISOUN

[*To Chaucer.*]

Go thy ways!

[*Draws them aside.*]

Come here, sweethearts! Hark! I have made a bet
With goodman Geoffrey yonder. Him as helps
Me best to win my bet, by God! he shall
Make merry for my marriage. Come, which fellow
Will help me?

ALL

I!

ALISOUN

The best shall make me bride.

[*A kitchen-boy blows a horn.*]

BOY

[*Shouts.*]

Meat!

[*Servants enter with steaming trenchers; the other pilgrims come in and seat themselves at the table. The Prioress stands hesitating. Chaucer goes to meet her.*]

HOST

[*Rises on a bench.*]

Lordings, who goes to Canterbury?

ALL

I!

CHAUCER

[*Offers his arm to the Prioress.*]

Madame, will you vouchsafe to me the honour?

PRIORESS

[*With a stately courtesy.*]

Merci.

ALISOUN

[*Imitating the Prioress, takes his other arm.*]

Merci!

[*Chaucer escorts them both to the table, where he sits between them.*]

HOST

Lordings! Now hearkneth to a merry game.
To-morrow when you canter by the way
It is no mirth to ride dumb as a stone.
I say — let every fellow tell a tale
To short the time, and him as tells the best
You'll give a supper here when ye return.
Lo! I myself will ride with you and judge.
If ye assent, hold up your hands.

ALL

Aye! Aye!

HOST

To-morrow then to Canterbury!

ALL

To Canterbury!

[*Amid the babbling din of eating, drinking, and laughter, Alisoun leans across Chaucer's trencher towards the Prioress.*]

ALISOUN

Who is the lean wench, Geoffrey?

PRIORESS

By St. Loy!

Explicit pars prima.

ACT SECOND

"WHAN that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open ye,
(So pricketh hem nature in hir corages):
Then longen folk to goon on pilgrimages."

ACT II

TIME: April 19th. The afternoon.

SCENE: Garden of the One Nine-pin inn at the little hamlet of Bob-up-and-down, en route to Canterbury.

Right, the inn, with door opening into garden. Back, a wall about chin-high in which is a wicket gate. The wall is newly greened over with honeysuckle and rose-vines, which are just beginning to blossom. Left, an arbour of the same. Right front, a rough table and chair. Behind the garden wall runs the highway, beyond which stretches a quiet rolling landscape, dotted with English elms and hedgerows.

When the curtain rises, the scene is empty. There is no sound except the singing of birds, and the hum of a loom inside the inn. Then, away to the left, is heard a bagpipe playing. It draws nearer. Behind the wall, then, against the green background of Spring, pass, in pageant, the CANTERBURY PILGRIMS *on horseback. Among the last, astride her ambler, rides the* WIFE OF BATH, *telling her tale, in the group with* CHAUCER *and the* PRIORESS. *Behind her follow the Swains, the* MILLER *playing the bagpipe. Last rides the* REEVE.

Behind the scene, they are heard to stop at the inn and call for hostlers. The bustle of arrival, horses led across a stone court, laughter and abuse, — these sounds are suf-

ficiently remote to add to the reigning sense of pleasant quietness in the garden. Through the door of the inn enters CHAUCER, *alone; in his hand, some parchments. He enters with an abandon of glad-heartedness, half reading from his parchments.*

CHAUCER

"When that April with his sunny showers
Hath from the drought of March the dreamy powers
Awaked, and steeped the world in such sweet wine
As doth engender blossoms of the vine;
When merry Zephirus, with his soft breath,
In every hedge and heath inspireth
The tender greening shoots, and the young Sun
Hath half his course within the Ram y-run,
And little birds all day make melody
That, all night long, sleep with an open ee,
(So Nature stirs 'em with delicious rages)
Then folk they long to go on pilgrimages—"

SQUIRE

[*Comes from the inn.*]

Dan Chaucer! Master Chaucer!

CHAUCER

Signorino!

SQUIRE

Sir, what a ride! Was ever such a ride
As ours from London? Hillsides newly greened,
Brooks splashing silver in the small, sweet grass,
Pelt gusts of rain dark'ning the hills, and then
Wide swallowed up in sunshine! And to feel

My snorting jennet stamp the oozy turf
Under my stirrup, whilst from overhead
Sonnets shook down from every bough. Oh, sir,
Rode Cæsar such a triumph from his wars
When Rome's high walls were garlanded with girls?

CHAUCER

Boy, let me hug thee!

SQUIRE

Noble sir!

CHAUCER

[*Embracing him.*]

A hug!
Spring makes us youths together. On such a day
Old age is fuddled and time's weights run down.
Hark!

[*A cuckoo sounds; they listen.*]

The meadow is the cuckoo's clock, and strikes
The hour at every minute; larks run up
And ring its golden chimes against the sun.

SQUIRE

Sir, only lovers count the time in heaven.
Are you in love, too?

CHAUCER

Over head and heart.

SQUIRE

Since long?

CHAUCER

These forty years.

SQUIRE

Nay, is your mistress
So old?

CHAUCER

She's still kind.

SQUIRE

Kind, yet old! Nay, what's
Her name?

CHAUCER

Hush, she will hear thee.

SQUIRE

Hear me?

CHAUCER

[*Mysteriously.*]

Hush!
Mine own true mistress is sweet Out-of-doors.
No Whitsun lassie wears so green a kirtle,
Nor sings so clear, nor smiles with such blue eyes,
As bonny April, winking tears away.
Not flowers o' silk upon an empress' sleeve
Can match the broidery of an English field.
No lap of amorous lady in the land
Welcomes her gallant, as sweet Mistress Earth
Her lover. Let Eneas have his Dido!
Daffydowndilly is the dame for me.

PRIORESS

[*Within.*]

Joannes!

SQUIRE

You are happy, sir, to have
Your mistress always by you. Mine's afar
Turning the Italian roses pale with envy.

CHAUCER

She dwells in Italy?

SQUIRE

In Padua.

CHAUCER

In Padua? Why, there I knew Dan Petrarch,
Whose sonnets make the world love-sick for Laura.

SQUIRE

Would I could make it sigh once for my lady!
Sir, will you help me?

CHAUCER

Gladly; what's her name?

SQUIRE

Alas! Her name is not poetical:
Johanna! Who can sonnetize Johanna?

CHAUCER

Invent her one to please you.

SQUIRE

Euphranasia —
How like you Euphranasia, sir?

FRIAR

[*Aside, popping his head from behind the wall.*]

Qui la?

[*Dodges down again.*]

PRIORESS

[*Within, singing.*]

Laudate, pueri, Dominum; laudate nomen Domini!
Nay, Paulus, I *will* sing: 'tis pretty weather.

SQUIRE

Euridice or Helena?

PRIORESS

[*Sings within.*]

A solis ortu usque ad occasum, laudabile nomen Domini.

SQUIRE

Or, Thisbe?

CHAUCER

[*Lifting a sprig of honeysuckle on the wall.*]

Nay, boy, this spray shall name her.

[*The Friar peeps over the wall again.*]

SQUIRE

Eglantine!
Music itself! Methinks I have an aunt
Named Eglantine. What matter? — Eglantine!

CHAUCER

I'll match that name against the Muses nine.

[*Takes out his parchments.*]

SQUIRE

What! verses?

CHAUCER

Scraps of prologue to a book
I think to call "The Canterbury Tales."
Good boy, leave me a bit; I have the fit
To rhyme for a time thy Donna Eglantine.
Come back at chapel-bell, or send someone
To fetch the verses.

SQUIRE

Sir, I will.

[*Exit left.*]

FRIAR

Me voila!

[*Exit right, behind wall.*]

CHAUCER

[*Reading from one of his parchments, crosses over by the arbour.*]

"There was also a nun, a prioress,
That of her smiling was full simple and coy;
The greatest oath she swore was 'by St. Loy!'
And she was clepèd Madame Eglantine;
Full daintily she sung the psalms divine;
And French she spake (St. Patrick taught her how),
After the school of Stratford-at-the-Bowe.

Full prettily her wimple pinchèd was,
Her nose piquante; her eyes as grey as glass;
Her mouth full small, and thereto soft and red;
In very sooth she had a fair forehead;
And dangling from her dainty wristlet small,
A brooch of gold she wore, and therewithal
Upon it there was writ a crownèd A,
And after —

[*Enter, right, the Prioress, carrying her little hound. Chaucer sees her.*]

Amor vincit omnia."

[*He enters the arbour.*]

PRIORESS

Joannes, stay indoors and tell your beads.

[*To her little hound.*]

Jacquette, ma petite, it is a pretty day.
See you those clouds? They are St. Agnes' sheep;
She hath washed their wool all white and turned 'em loose
To play on heaven's warm hillside. Smell that rose?
Sweet — sweet! n'est ce pas, ma petite? Hast ever heard
The Romance of the Rose?

CHAUCER

[*Aside.*]

Saints!

PRIORESS

'Tis a tale
As lovely as the flower, — writ all in verses
Dan Chaucer made at court. Hush, hush, don't tell:
I've read it. Ah! Jacquette! Jacquette! Jacquette!
When Mary was a girl in Joseph's garden,
Were there such pretty days in Palestine?

[*Picks a rose.*]

CHAUCER

Gods! must I hand her over — to a brother!
Alas! the sands of dreams, how fast they slip
Till Geoffrey lose his Lord-protectorship.

PRIORESS

[*Plucking the rose's petals till the last petal falls.*]

Pater noster (our Father), qui es in cœlis (which art in heaven), sanctificetur nomen tuum (hallowed be thy name). Adveniat regnum tuum (thy kingdom come); fiat voluntas tua — thy will be done!

CHAUCER

Amen! I must resign!

[*He is about to step out from the arbour and discover himself, but pauses as the Prioress continues.*]

PRIORESS

Alas! We must go seek my brother and so
Quit the protection of this noble stranger.
You know, Jacquette, we must be fond of him.
He saved your life — we mustn't forget that.

And though the wastel-bread was underdone,
He was most kind at table, and inquired
After your health, petite. And though he kissed
The ale-wife — oui, ma pauvre Jacquette! — yet he
Is contrite, and will seek St. Thomas' shrine
For absolution.

CHAUCER

Forgive us our trespasses!

PRIORESS

He was so courteous, too, upon the road
I'm sure he is a gentleman. Indeed,
I hope my brother proves as true a knight,
When he arrives.

CHAUCER

Deliver us from temptation!

[*A shout from the pilgrims within.*]

PRIORESS

Would he were here now. — Nay, I mean — the other.
This April day flowed sweet as a clear brook
Till these hoarse frogs jumped in to rile its silver.

SWAINS

[*Sing, within.*]

The Wife of Bath
She's a good fellow,
A maiden mellow
Of Aftermath.

PRIORESS

Vite, vite, ma petite.

[*She hastens to the arbour, where Chaucer quickly pretends to be absorbed in writing. As she is withdrawing hastily, however, he turns round.*]

Monsieur, excusez moi!

CHAUCER

Madame, the fault is mine; I crave your pardon.

PRIORESS

What fault, Monsieur?

CHAUCER

[*Breaks a spray from the arbour and hands it to her.*]

I trespass in *your* bower.

Permettez.

PRIORESS

Honeysuckle?

CHAUCER

So 'tis called;

But poets, lady, name it — eglantine.

PRIORESS

M'sieur!

CHAUCER

May I remain and call it so?

PRIORESS

M'sieur — this is Jacquette, my little hound.

[*Chaucer takes the pup; they retire farther into the arbour, as the* WIFE OF BATH *enters from the inn. She is accompanied by the* FRIAR, MILLER, COOK, SUMMONER, PARDONER, MANCIPLE, *and* SHIPMAN, *who enter singing. They lift her upon the table, and form a circle round her.*]

SWAINS

The Wife of Bath
She's a good fellow,
A maiden mellow
Of Aftermath.

She cuts a swath
Through sere-and-yellow;
No weeping willow
Bestrews her path.

Her voice in wrath
Is a bullock's bellow;
For every good fellow
Eyes she hath.

She's a good fellow,
The Wife of Bath!

ALISOUN

Sweethearts, your lungs can blow the buck's horn. — Robin,
Ye sing like a bittern bumbling in the mire.

MILLER

By Corpus, 'twas a love-toot.

FRIAR

Prithee, sweet dame,
Finish your tale.

ALL

Finish the tale.

[*Other pilgrims enter from the inn.*]

ALISOUN

Shut up, lads. Sure, my wits are gone blackberrying.
Where was I?

FRIAR

Where King Arthur's knight came home,
You said, and —

ALISOUN

Will you let me say it then?

FRIAR

Sweet dame, you said —

ALISOUN

A friar and a fly
Will fall in every dish, that's what I said.
Lads, will ye hear this church-bell ring, or me?

ALL

You — you —

SUMMONER

I'll muffle his clapper.

ALISOUN

Hark my tale:
This knight rode home a-whistlin' to himself,
Right up the castle-hall, where all the lords
And ladies sat. "Your majesties," quoth he,
"Though I be hanged, this is my true reply:
Women desire to do their own sweet wills."

[*The Swains clap.*]

"Ho!" cried King Arthur, "that's the best I've heard
Since I was first henpecked by Guinevere.
Depart! Thy neck is free!"
But at that word,
Up sprang an old wife, sitting by the fire,
And says: "Merci, your Majesty, 'twas I
That taught this answer to the knight; and he
Hath sworn to do the next thing I require.
Therefore, sweet knight, before this court I pray
That ye will take me to your wedded wife.
Have I said false?"
"Nay, bury me," quoth he.
"Then I will be thy love."
"My love?" quoth he.
"Nay, my damnation!"
"Take your wife to church,"
Cries out the King, "and look ye treat her well,
Or you shall hang."

MILLER

Ho! What a roast!

PRIORESS

[*Aside.*]

Poor man!

ALISOUN

The knight he spake no word, but forth he takes
His grizzly bride to church, and after dark
He leads her home. "Alas! sweet husband mine,
What troubleth you?" quoth she. "Nothing,"
quoth he.
"Perchance that I am old?" "Nay, nay," quoth he.
"Ugly and old," quoth she, "cures jealousy."
"It doth indeed," quoth he. "What then?" quoth she.
"Are ye content?" "More than content," quoth he;
"And will ye let me do my own sweet will
In everything?" "In everything," quoth he,
"My lady and my love, do as you please."
"Why, then, so please me, strike a light," quoth she.
And when the knight had lit the candle, lo!
His grizzly bride — she was the Fairy Queen.

[*Loud acclamation.*]

PRIORESS

[*Aside.*]

Praise heaven!

FRIAR

[*Into whose arms Alisoun jumps.*]

Bravo, Queen Mab, it was thyself.

COOK

I'll bet
The knight was her fifth husband.

ALISOUN

Welcome the sixth!
God made me the King Solomon of wives.

SHIPMAN

[*To the Miller, who begins to play his pipes.*]

God save thee, Robin! Bust thy pigskin.

ALISOUN

Aye!
Let's have an elf dance. Come!

[*To the Summoner.*]

Thy arm, sweet Puck!

BOTTLEJOHN

[*To Herry Bailey, who is looking on.*]

Tarry ye all to-night?

HOST

Aye, till to-morrow.

BOTTLEJOHN

'Twill be a pinch for room.

HOST

[*Laughs.*]

But not for reckonings.

[*The Miller, sitting on the wall, plays his bagpipe, while Alisoun dances with her Swains, each of whom is jealous of the rest. Chaucer and the Prioress still remain out of sight in the arbour. As the music grows merrier, the Prioress begins to click the beads of her rosary rhythmically.*]

CHAUCER

Why do you tell your beads, Madame?

PRIORESS

To keep
The fairies from my feet.

CHAUCER

The fairies?

PRIORESS

Yes,
The bagpipe sets them free. I feel them twitch me.

CHAUCER

Why drive them away?

PRIORESS

Monsieur!

CHAUCER

See you the birds?
St. Francis taught that we should learn of them.

PRIORESS

What do they?

CHAUCER

Sing, and dance from bough to bough.
The Muses sing; and St. Cecilia danced.

PRIORESS

Think you she danced, sir, of her own sweet will?

CHAUCER

Nay, not in April! In April, 'tis God's will.

PRIORESS

Monsieur —

[*Gives Chaucer her hand shyly.*]

'tis April.

[*They dance, in stately fashion, within the arbour. Forgetting themselves in the dance, however, they come a little too far forward; Alisoun spies them, and clapping her hands, the music stops.*]

ALISOUN

Caught! Ho, turtle-doves!
Come forth, Sir Elvish Knight, Sir Oberon!
Fetch forth thy veilèd nymph, that trips so fair.

[*Chaucer steps forth from the arbour. The Prioress, within, seizes up her little hound from a settle and hides her face.*]

ALL

Hail!

CHAUCER

Silence, loons! And thou, wife, hold thy tongue
And know thy betters. As for you, ye lummocks,
You need be proud as water in a ditch
To glass this lady's image even in your eyes,
So, look ye muddy not her sandal-tips.
Begone! And mind when next you laugh the same,
That all the saints, to whom you bumpkins pray,
Dance with the Virgin round the throne of God.
Begone, and do your reverences.

[*Some of the pilgrims retire; others remain staring and bow as the Prioress, veiled, crosses over to the inn door with her little hound.*]

ALISOUN

[*To the Cook.*]

Hist, Roger!
What is the man?

COOK

No cheap dough.

PRIORESS

O Jacquette!

[*Exit.*]

ALISOUN

[*Approaches Chaucer tentatively.*]

God save thee, man! I ken not who thou art,
But him's can curry down a ticklish mare
Like me, he hath a backbone in his bolster;
I love thee better for 't. — Ay, gang thy gait;
But, bully Geoffrey, mind, we have a bet:
Yea, if I fry thee not in thine own grease
And cry thee tit for tat, call me a man.
Man lives *for* wit, but woman lives *by* it. —
These dancing virgins!

[*Exit, followed by Friar.*]

CHAUCER

Clods and bumpkins all!

MILLER

[*Gets in Chaucer's way defiantly.*]

Sir Oberon —

CHAUCER

Stand by!

MILLER

Lord Rim-Ram-Ruff!

He plays the courtier.

[*Bitterly.*]

Harkee, Monsieur Courtier,
"When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?"

CHAUCER

Why, Monsieur Snake; he cherished the family tree
As the apple of his eye. In view of which,
Go drink a pot of cider.

[*Throws the Miller a coin.*]

MILLER

[*Ducking.*]

'Save your Worship!

[*Exit with Swains.*]

CHAUCER

[*Solus.*]

"When Adam delved" — who was court-poet then?
Adam. Who was Bob Clodhopper? Why, Adam.
Which, then, in that close body politic
Perked high his chin? Which doffed and ducked the knee?
Which tanned and sweat in the lean furrow? Which
Spat on the spade — and wore it in his crest?
Which was the real Adam? Sly Dame Clay,
If paradox died not in Genesis,

Let me not fancy Richard's laureate
Alone's incognito. Incognito
Are all that pass in nature's pilgrimage,
For thou, with loamy masks and flesh-tint veils,
Dost make us, in this timeless carnival,
Thy dupes and dancers, ushering the courtier
To kiss beneath thy glove the goose-girl's hand,
Or snub, behind the poor familiar rogue
And clown, some god that hides in Momus' mask.
Nay, but not she — my gentle Prioress!
Though all the rest, in born disguisements, be
Basted and togg'd with huge discrepancy,
She wears the proper habit of her soul.
Dear God! how harmony like hers unchains
Delight from the lugg'd body of Desire
To sing toward heaven like the meadow-lark,
Till, with her parting, it drops dumb again
In the old quag of flesh.
Flesh, Geoffrey! Fie!
What need to guard from sight the poet in thee
When nature thus hath hoop'd and wadded him
With barracoons of paunch? What say, thou tun?
Will Eglantine mistake thee for Apollo,
Thou jewel in the bloated toad; thou bagpipe
Puff'd by the Muse; thou demijohn of nectar;
Thou grape of Hebe, over-ripe with rhyme;
Thou lump of Clio, mountain of Terpsichore;
Diogenes, that talkest in thy tub!
Fie, Mother Earth! — Cling not about my waist
As if I were a weanling sphere. Fall off!
Ye gods! that kneaded this incongruous dough

With lyric leaven, sweat me to a rake-handle
Or let the Muse grow fat!

[*Exit.*]

FRIAR

[*Outside, sings.*]

Ye pouting wenches, pretty wives,
That itch at weddings, fairs, and wakes,
For trothal-rings and kissing-cakes,
For wristlets, pins, and pearlèd knives,
Hither trip it!
To peep i' the friar's farsèd tippet,
Who gently for sweet sinners' sakes —

[*Enter the Friar and Alisoun.*]

ALISOUN

Hush!

[*Going to the cellar-door, she opens it and ponders.*]

FRIAR

Ben'cite!
(Thus singeth he.)
Bene — benedicite!

ALISOUN

Hold thy cock-crow! My wit's working.

FRIAR

Nay,
Thy jealousy, sweet dame.

[*Sings.*]

Ye lasses jilted, lovers droopèd,
Rose-lip —

ALISOUN

Shut up!

FRIAR

[*Sings on.*]

Rose-lip, White-brow, Blue-eye, Brown-tress,
Confide your pretty hearts! Confess
To the pleasant friar: trust not Cupid—

ALISOUN

By Peter!
I have the plan!

FRIAR

[*Sings.*]

Love is a liar,
But lovers love the pleasant friar,
Who, making of their burdens less—

[*Here he approaches Alisoun caressingly, and deftly steals a gold pin from her head-dress.*]

ALISOUN

[*Laughing to herself.*]

Ha! that shall win my bet!
What, Huberd!

FRIAR

[*Secreting the pin.*]

Ben'cite!
(Thus singeth he.)
Bene — benedicite!

ALISOUN

Wilt thou hear my plan?

FRIAR

Fair Alis,
I would console thy jealousy.

ALISOUN

Me jealous!
Blest be thy breech! Who of?

FRIAR

[*Imitating Chaucer in his former speech.*]

"And, thou, wife, hold
Thy tongue and know thy betters."

ALISOUN

Ho! my betters?
That little snipper-snapper of a saint
He praised for dancing ring-around-the-rose-tree,
When honest wives are damned for showing their ankles?
A fig for her! — What, him! a walking hay-cock
That woos a knitting-needle of a nun!
And me! that when I was to home in Bath
Walked into kirk before the beadle's wife:
My betters? Wait until I win my bet!

FRIAR

What bet?

ALISOUN

Canst thou be mum?

FRIAR

Dame, I have been
A bishop's valet, a nun's confidant,
A wife's confessor, a maid's notary;

As coroner, I've sat in Cheapside inns
When more than wine flowed. This breast can be dark
As Pharaoh's chamber in the pyramids.

ALISOUN

List then: Ye wot I made a bet last night
With Geoffrey. This was it: Dame Eglantine,
Here at this inn, expects to meet her brother —

FRIAR

You mean — Dan Roderigo.

ALISOUN

Aye; but as
She hath not seen him since she was a child,
She hath not recognised him. He, ye ken,
Doth wear a ring wi' a Latin posy in't.

FRIAR

I know; 'tis "Amor vincit omnia,"
The same as on her brooch.

ALISOUN

There hangs my bet.
For if Dame Eglantine shall give yon brooch
Into the hands of any but her brother,
Then Geoffrey marries me at Canterbury.

FRIAR

Diable! *Marries* thee?

ALISOUN

What then, dear friend?
Wouldst thou forswear thy celibate sweet vows
To buckle on a wife?

FRIAR

Nay, dame, a sister.

ALISOUN

A sister of St. Venus' house? Go pray!
A husband is my holy pilgrimage,
And Geoffrey is my shrine.

FRIAR

Et moi?

ALISOUN

"Et moi?"
Thou art a jolly incubus. Thou shalt
Help me to catch my bird.

[*Enter the Miller by the wicket gate.*]

FRIAR

Et donc?

ALISOUN

"Et donc?"
Why, then, I'll give a farthing to the friars.

FRIAR

Nay, dame, the coin of Cupid is a kiss.

[*Pleading.*]

One kiss pour moi. — At Canterbury — un baiser!

MILLER

[*Seizing the Friar.*]

One pasty, eh? thou shorn ape!

FRIAR

[*Screams.*]

Alisoun!

MILLER

By Corpus bones, I'll baste thee!

ALISOUN

Let him be!

Shame! Wouldst thou violate a modest friar?

MILLER

He asked thee for a —

ALISOUN

Baiser. Baiser means

In Latin tongue a blessing. Not so, Huberd?

FRIAR

Dame, from thy lips, it meaneth Paradise.

MILLER

[*Imitating him.*]

Doth it in thooth, thweet thir? — Thou lisping jay!

Thou lousy petticoats!

ALISOUN

[*Suddenly embracing the Miller; whispers to him.*]

Whist! Robin, thou

Art just in the nick. I have a plan. Run fast;

Fetch here the other lads, and bring a gag.

MILLER

A gag? For him?

ALISOUN

Run quick.

MILLER

[*Going.*]

By Corpus arms!

FRIAR

[*Taunting.*]

Mealy miller, moth-miller,
Fly away!
If Dame Butterfly doth say thee nay,
Go and court a caterpillar!

MILLER

[*Laughing, shakes his fist.*]

Ha, ha! By Corpus bones!

[*Exit at gate.*]

ALISOUN

Now, bird; the plot.
I've sent him for a gag.

FRIAR

A gag? What for?

ALISOUN

To win my bet, of course. 'Tis for this knight.

FRIAR

Thou wilt not gag a knight — the Prioress'
Brother!

ALISOUN

Hast thou forgot I bet with Geoffrey
The man that wears the ring will prove to be
Dame Virtue's lover?

FRIAR

He that wears the ring?
Methinks I smell: but who's your man?

ALISOUN

Sweet owl,
The sunlight hurts thine eyes, thou starest too hard.
[*Blindfolding his eyes with her hands, she whirls him thrice round.*]
Behold him.

FRIAR

[*Dizzily.*]
Where?

[*Alisoun slaps her own shoulder.*]

What, thou? O ecce homo!
Thou wilt enact the lover and the knight
And woo Dame Eglantine?

ALISOUN

Who else? Forsooth,
I am a shapely crusader. This leg
Hath strode a palfrey thrice to Palestine.
I've won my spurs.

FRIAR

Thou wit of Aristotle.
O Helen of Troy! O Amazon! I catch:
Thou gaggest the *real* knight and bear'st him off
Where thou mayst steal his ring and togs.

ALISOUN

And borrow
A false beard from thy tippet. Thou shalt be
My valet, and retouch the Wife of Bath
To play the Devil in the Mystery.

FRIAR

But where'll be thy boudoir?

ALISOUN

The cellar yonder.
Bob Miller and the other lads shall gag
And tie him there.

FRIAR

Why, this is merrier than
Nine wenches ducking in a Hallow-een bowl.

[*Doubling over with laughter, he almost knocks against Chaucer, who enters, left, meditative.*]

Whist! Geoffrey! Come away.

CHAUCER

[*Reads from a parchment.*]

"April, May,
Cannot stay;
We be pilgrims — so are they,
And our shrine,
Far away — "

[*A bell sounds outside; Chaucer pauses, and draws out a pocket sun-dial.*]

The chapel bell!
Four, by my cylinder. My signorino
Will claim his verses!

[*Reads on.*]

"And our shrine,
Far away,
Is the heart of Eglantine."
[*Pauses and writes.*]

ALISOUN
[*Aside to Friar.*]
Eglantine! What's this?

FRIAR
Love verses. He hath writ them for the Squire
To give unto his lady-love Johanna.

ALISOUN
But he said "Eglantine."

FRIAR
Aye, dame; he dubs
Her Eglantine to be poetical.

ALISOUN
A poet! Him?

FRIAR
Why not? Jack Straw himself
Could ring a rhyme, God wot, till his neck was wrung.

CHAUCER
[*Reads.*]
"Eglantine,
O to be
There with thee,
Over sea,
In olive-shaded Italy."
Too rough. "Shaded" is harsh. H'm! "Olive-silvered."
"In olive-silvered Italy." — That's better.

FRIAR

[*To Alisoun.*]

Hide there!

ALISOUN

What now?

FRIAR

Watch.

[*The Friar approaches Chaucer obsequiously.*]

CHAUCER

[*Reads.*]

"There to pray
At thy shrine—"

FRIAR

Benedicite!
The blissful martyr save you, sir.

CHAUCER

And you.

FRIAR

The gentle Squire sent me for—

CHAUCER

His verses?
They are just finished.

[*Folds them up.*]

FRIAR

Sir, you see, he hailed me
Passing upon the road. He lies out yonder
Along a brookside, sighing for his lady.

CHAUCER

[*Handing the parchment to the Friar.*]

Bid him despatch her these. Here, wait; this spray
Of eglantine goes with them.

FRIAR

Save you, sir.

[*The Friar starts for the wicket gate. Chaucer, absent-minded, passes on to the inn door. As he does so, the Friar, treading tip-toe behind him, steals another parchment, which is sticking from his pouch.*]

CHAUCER

"April, May,
Cannot stay;
We be pilgrims — so are they."

[*Exit.*]

FRIAR

[*Stands holding the second parchment, from which he reads.*]

"There was also a nun, a prioress,
That of her smiling was full simple and coy;
The greatest oath she swore — "

Blessed be larceny!
This rhyme is slicker to have up my sleeve
Than five aces of trumps.

ALISOUN

[*Joining him.*]

What's up?

FRIAR

List, dame!
Of human hearts I am an alchemist.
To stir them in the crucible of love
Is all my research and experiment;
And but to find a new amalgam makes
My mouth to water like a dilettante's.

ALISOUN

Well?

FRIAR

Geoffrey wrote these verses for the Squire
To give his lady; therefore, *I* will give them
To Eglantine, and watch the *tertium quid;*
That is to say, whether the resultant be
A mantling *coleur rose*, or — an explosion.

ALISOUN

What's in the verses? Nay, man, read 'em out;
I am no clerk.

FRIAR

I am a master-reader.

"Sigh, Spring, sigh,
Repine
Amid the moon-kissed eglantine,
For so do I."

[*The Friar sighs.*]

ALISOUN

No more o' that.

FRIAR

Sweet Alis, 'tis the art.
When I look thus, — 'tis moonlight. When I sigh
Thus, — 'tis a zephyr wooing apple blossoms.

ALISOUN

Wooing a sick goat! Read ahead.

FRIAR

Ahem!

[*Reads.*]

"April, May,
Cannot —"

[*Enter, from the inn, the Knight; from the wicket gate, the Swains, with ropes and a gag.*]

ALISOUN

Quit; here's our knight. Go find the Prioress.
And when you've given her the verses, join
Me and the other fellows in the cellar.

[*Jerking her thumb at the Knight.*]

He'll be with us.

FRIAR

Thy valet comprehends.

KNIGHT

[*To Friar.*]

Good fellow, have you seen my son, the Squire?

FRIAR

My lord, that dame can tell you.

[*Throwing a kiss to Alisoun.*]

Au revoir!

[*Then throwing another to the Miller, he sings as he skips out.*]

Ma douce gazelle,
Ma gazelle belle,
Bon soir!

MILLER

[*To the Shipman.*]

Quick! Head him off, Jack!

[*Exit Friar into inn.*]

ALISOUN

Let him go.

[*To the Miller.*]

Thine ear!

MILLER

But—

ALISOUN

Shh!

[*Draws him aside and whispers.*]

Art thou afeard?

MILLER

Nay, dame, but 'tis
A lord. Mayhap we'd catch the whipping-post.

ALISOUN

But mayhap me along with it, sweet Bob.

[*They whisper aside.*]

KNIGHT

This woman tell me of my son! 'Tis strange.

ALISOUN

[*Aside to Miller.*]

Ye ken!

MILLER

Aye, aye.

[*Looking pleased, he speaks to the others aside. During the following scene, all of them approach the Knight cautiously with the ropes and gag, while Alisoun, distracting the Knight, warns or urges them in pantomime.*]

KNIGHT

Good woman, have you seen—

ALISOUN

And do mine eyes behold him once again?
O sir! The blissful saints requite you, sir!

KNIGHT

For what, good dame?

ALISOUN

His voice! That I should hear
His voice once more! The vision bursts again
Upon my brain: the swords, the sweated horse,
The lifted battle-mace, and then his arms,
His arms around me — saved!

[*Falling at his feet.*]

Oh, can it be?

KNIGHT

Madame, arise. We met last night, methinks,
At Master Bailey's inn, in Southwark, but
Never before.

ALISOUN

[*Rising.*]

Hold! Gallop not so fast,
Ye steeds of Memory! — Was it perchance
A lonely damsel by the Coal Black Sea,
Forsaken save by him; or was it by
The walls of old Granada, at the siege,
When, dazzled by the white star of my beauty,
He raised his cross to smite the lustful Moor,
And cried, "Don Roderigo dies for thee!"

KNIGHT

[*To the Miller.*]

The woman is ill. You had best call a leach.

ALISOUN

Call no one, sir. Forgive my sentiment.
Small wonder is it, though the lordly falcon
Forget the dove he succoured from the crows.
But ah! how can the tender dove conceal
The flutterings of her snow-white breast to meet
Her lord once more?

KNIGHT

[*Going.*]

Madame, I wish you better.

ALISOUN

Dear lord, when last we met at Algezir —

KNIGHT

Pray to the Virgin!

ALISOUN

Sweet lord! —

KNIGHT

By St. George,
I know you not.

ALISOUN

Alas! Alas! The faithless!
Was this the chivalry ye promised me
That night ye kissed me by the soldan's tent?

KNIGHT

Off me, thou wife of Satan!

ALISOUN

Heard ye that?
Lads, to the rescue!

KNIGHT

Sorcery!

[*The Miller and Alisoun gag the Knight, while the others assist in binding him.*]

ALISOUN

Quick, Roger!
Take off his finger-ring. Mum, sweethearts! In, now!

[*Exeunt omnes, carrying the Knight into the inn cellar.*]
[*Enter the Squire and Johanna. Passing along behind the wall, they enter the garden by the wicket gate.*]

SQUIRE

Lady, I cannot yet believe my eyes
That you are here, and not in Padua.

JOHANNA

'Tis sweet to hear your voice discredit mine,
And yet I pray you, sir, believe in me;
I would not prove a rich Lombardian dream
To be more fair — even than I am.

SQUIRE

You could not.

JOHANNA

Grazie!

SQUIRE

For you authenticise yourself
With beauty's passport. This alone is you;
But how come hither?

JOHANNA

Like the Spring, because
I heard the snows had thawed in Merry England.

SQUIRE

As ever, you're fellow-travellers, dear lady;
I might have guessed it from the little birds,
Your gossipy outriders. But with what
Less winged chaperones came you?

JOHANNA

Nay, with none!
Some flighty ladies of King Richard's court
That oped their beaks — but not like nightingales —
To prate of love. For my part when I saw them
This morning trot away toward Canterbury
With that dull Gaunt and silly Duke of Ireland,
I sighed "sweet riddance." True, the king is different,
But he is married.

SQUIRE

You are not alone?

JOHANNA

No, sir. I travel with a world-stormed priest,
Whom all who love him call "Good Master Wycliffe";
And those who love him not, "Old Nick," for writing
The gospels in dear English.

SQUIRE

You — a Lollard!

JOHANNA

Wait till you know him. He rides now to assist
High mass at the Cathedral, for Duke John
Who sails to claim his kingdom in Castile.
But I ride with him, not so much to absolve
My sins, — which frankly, since they are so few
And serviceable, I hate to part with — as
I go to look on one shall grace that service —
The man I best admire.

SQUIRE

Sweet lady, whom?

JOHANNA

Dan Chaucer — laureate of chivalry.

SQUIRE

Chaucer! Why he —

[*Checks himself.*]

Alas!

JOHANNA

Scarce do I wonder
To see you bite your lip at that great name:
You, sir, who once, unless my memory fail,
Did promise me some verses of your own.

SQUIRE

Nay, you shall have them.

JOHANNA

What? The verses?

SQUIRE

Yes.

JOHANNA

Prithee, what are they? Rondeaux, amoretti,
Ballads? Why did you send them not? Odes?
Sonnets?
Which?

SQUIRE

Nay, I know not.

JOHANNA

Know not?

SQUIRE

Not as yet.

JOHANNA

Know not as yet!

SQUIRE

I mean — O Donna mine!
I have a friend, whom but to call my friend
Sets all my thoughts on fire, and makes the world
A pent-up secret burning to be told.
Whose slave to be, I would roll Sisyphus' stone;
Whom to clasp hands withal, I'd fight Apollyon;
For whom but to be Pythias, I would die.

JOHANNA

What amorous Platonics! Pythias?
Sure, Troilus were an apter choice. Well, sir,
Who is this paragon?

[*Aside.*]

Heaven send her freckles.

SQUIRE

Nay, if it were allowed me but to name —
If you could guess the Olympian pedigree —

[*Enter Chaucer from the inn.*]

Ah! Here he comes!

JOHANNA

Pray, sir, *who* comes?

SQUIRE

My friend.

CHAUCER

[*Scanning the ground.*]

I would not for good twenty pound have lost it.

JOHANNA

Is this your Damon?

SQUIRE

Lady, 'tis my friend.

CHAUCER

[*To himself.*]

If Madame Eglantine should find it, read it!
Nay, not for forty pound.

SQUIRE

He does not see us.
May I present him?

JOHANNA

[*Nods carelessly, then aside.*]

Saints! Must I essay
To circumvent a rival of such scope?

SQUIRE

Great sir!

JOHANNA

"Great sir" 's a proper epithet.

SQUIRE

[*Touching Chaucer's sleeve.*]

I prithee —

CHAUCER

Ah, boy, well met! Did I perchance —

[*Seeing Johanna.*]

Pardon!

SQUIRE

[*Whispers to Chaucer, then aloud to Johanna.*]

Permit me to present to you —
Lady Johanna, Marchioness of Kent —
This gentleman, my friend.

JOHANNA

[*Bows slightly.*]

A nameless knight?

SQUIRE

[*Embarrassed.*]

His name — ah!

CHAUCER

Master Geoffrey, and your servant.

JOHANNA

[*To Chaucer.*]

We saw you searching. Was it for a sur-name?

SQUIRE

Have you lost something? Let us help you find it.
A purse?

JOHANNA

I trust your loss was not in pounds.

CHAUCER

Sooth, I have lost what fair your ladyship
Could least, methinks, supply — a piece of wit
Without a tongue; that is, a piece of parchment
Writ o'er with verses.

SQUIRE

Verses! Sir, a word.

[*Draws Chaucer aside to the arbour and whispers.*]

JOHANNA

A clever rogue! He'd make an apt court-fool.

CHAUCER

[*Aside to Squire.*]

No; these lost verses were a mere description —
To fit my prologue — of a dainty nun,
Poking some gentle mirth at her; of use
To none save me; but faith! I grudge 'em dearly.

SQUIRE

Did you find time to write — the other verses?

CHAUCER

The others?

SQUIRE

To my lady.

CHAUCER

Those you sent for?
Did not you like them?

SQUIRE

I? I sent for none, sir.

JOHANNA

[*Aside.*]

Still whispering? Faith! Hath my Aubrey lost
Both heart and manners to this tavern rhymester?
I will not have it.

SQUIRE

[*To Chaucer.*]

But I sent no friar!

CHAUCER

He took your mistress's verses, saying you
Had sent for them by him.

JOHANNA

Excuse me, sirs:
That arbour-seat has room for two to sit,
Providing we choose wisely from us three.

CHAUCER

Your choice is fate.

SQUIRE

[*Aside to Chaucer as they enter the arbour.*]

The friar must have stolen them.

[*Johanna and the Squire sit; Chaucer stands talking with them, his back toward the arbour's entrance.*]

[*Enter, right, from inn, the Prioress and Friar, the former reading a parchment.*]

PRIORESS

The verse is very beautiful.

FRIAR

Is't not
Enough to make the Muse weep amber? Zipp!
'Tis honey'd moonbeams stored in lachrymals.

PRIORESS

[*Reads.*]

"Eglantine,
O to be
There with thee,
Over sea,
In olive-silvered Italy."

But, gentle friar, why in Italy
When I'm in England?

FRIAR

Dame, 'tis poetry.
In poetry, all ladies have blue eyes
And live in Italy.

PRIORESS

And is this truly
For me?

FRIAR

He bade me give it with this spray.

L. of C.

PRIORESS

[*Taking the sprig of eglantine.*]

He is so chivalrous! But I must finish.

"In olive-silvered Italy.

There to pray
At thy shrine,
There to lay
This green spray
Of our English eglantine.
At thy feet.

Lady mine,
Then wouldst thou say:
'Pilgrim sweet
In Padua,
Take it; it is thine.'"

Is Padua short for Bob-up-and-down?

FRIAR

Yes, dame.

[*Aside.*]

And now to watch my experiment
Precipitate rose-colour.

PRIORESS

[*Sighs.*]

Almost finished!

[*Reads.*]

"Say not nay!
Fairest, dearest, far away,
Donna Eglantine."

FRIAR

Alas, Madame, I did but do my duty.
He bade me bring them.

PRIORESS

From my heart, I thank you.
They're very beautiful.

FRIAR

But amorous,
I fear; they are *love*-verses.

PRIORESS

Are they? Sure,
I thought them sweet. He is so chivalrous.

FRIAR

[*Aside, takes out his stolen parchment.*]

Soft, then, I'll try the other. This should bring
The explosion.

[*Rattles the parchment.*]

PRIORESS

[*Eagerly, laying the first parchment on the table.*]

Did he send more verses?

FRIAR

Nay,
He sent no more, though from his pouch there fell
This parchment; but methinks he would desire you
Not to peruse it.

[*Turning as if to leave, he discovers the three conversing in the arbour.*]

PRIORESS

Me!

FRIAR

Yes, dame, for it
Describes you.

PRIORESS

How?

FRIAR

Alas! In different vein
From the other.

PRIORESS

Different?

[*Demanding it with a gesture.*]

Quickly!

FRIAR

'Tis my duty.

[*Hands her the manuscript.*]

PRIORESS

[*Snatching it; reads.*]

"There was also a nun, a prioress,
That of her smiling was full simple and coy;
The greatest oath she swore was 'by St. Loy!'"

O ciel! O quel outrage!

[*While she reads on to herself, changing visibly to pique and tears, the Friar, purloining the first parchment from the table, trips over to the arbour's entrance and bows.*]

FRIAR

Diner est servi!
Messieurs, you are awaited by a lady.

[*Runs off.*]

CHAUCER

[*To Squire.*]

Quick! Catch him!

JOHANNA

[*To Squire.*]

Stay! "A lady?"

[*Pursued, the Friar drops his parchment, and, as the Squire stops to pick it up, escapes at the garden gate.*]

PRIORESS

[*Holding her parchment, confronts Chaucer.*]

Stay, Monsieur.

[*Reads.*]

"And French she spake (St. Patrick taught her how!)"
You hear, Monsieur — "St. Patrick taught her how!"
Oh, where is my Jacquette!

SQUIRE

[*Joyfully; glancing at the other parchment.*]

These are the verses!

[*Hands the parchment eagerly to Johanna.*]

CHAUCER

Madame, be calm. I will explain.

PRIORESS

Non, non.

JOHANNA

[*Reads.*]

"Eglantine,
O to be
There with thee—"

[*To Squire.*]

Wrote you these verses, sir? Who's Eglantine?

SQUIRE

Why, lady, she —

PRIORESS

[*To Chaucer.*]

How could you write them?

CHAUCER

Patience,
Dear Madame Eglantine —

JOHANNA

Ha! Eglantine!

CHAUCER

[*To Prioress, distracted.*]

Which verses do you mean? I wrote them not
To you!

PRIORESS

What, not to me? Those gracious lines,
So exquisite?

CHAUCER

Good God!

SQUIRE

[*To Johanna.*]

Upon my truth,
These verses are for you. Let me explain —

JOHANNA

Nay, let your friend.

[*Showing her parchment to Chaucer.*]

Sir, did you write these verses?

CHAUCER

I did!

PRIORESS

[*Showing her parchment.*]

And these, Monsieur?

CHAUCER

I did.

JOHANNA

And pray

To whom did you write *these?*

CHAUCER

To you.

JOHANNA

O Heaven!

PRIORESS

To her!

[*Unseen, save by the audience, the cellar door is opened, part way, and Alisoun peers out, dressed in the Knight's clothes, but still without a make-up. She winks to Huberd, whose head bobs up a moment from behind the wall.*]

SQUIRE

[*To Johanna.*]

Sweet mistress —

JOHANNA

I demand to know

Who is this rhyming man? Who was his father?

CHAUCER

My father was a vintner, dame, in London.

PRIORESS

A vintner?

SQUIRE

[*With pleading deprecation.*]

Sir —

JOHANNA

Small marvel that his son
Should be a cask.

ALISOUN

[*Aside, jubilantly.*]

God save my betters!

JOHANNA

[*To Squire.*]

"If
You could but guess the Olympian pedigree—"
Saints! Take me to my guardian, sir.

PRIORESS

[*To Chaucer.*]

Ah! bring
Me to my brother! O Monsieur! How false!

FRIAR

[*From behind the wall, sings.*]

Love is a liar,
But lovers love the pleasant friar,
Who, making of their burdens less—

CHAUCER AND SQUIRE

That friar!

FRIAR

[*Popping his head above the wall with a mock gesture of benediction, sings.*]

Ben'cite!
(Thus singeth he.)
Bene—benedicite!

Explicit pars secunda.

ACT THIRD

"WITE ye nat wher ther stant a litel toun
Which that y-clepèd is Bob-up-and-doun,
Under the Blee, in Caunterbury weye?"

ACT III

TIME: Evening of the same day.

SCENE: The hall of the One Nine-pin.

At the opening of the act all the PILGRIMS *are on the stage, except the following:* MILLER, SHIPMAN, COOK, MANCIPLE, SUMMONER, KNIGHT, ALISOUN, CHAUCER, *and* WYCLIFFE. *Owing to the overcrowding of the little inn, the hall is arranged, for the night, as a common sleeping-room. Up stage, right, is a great canopied bedstead, with steps to climb into it. Along the right wall are truckle-beds. As the curtain rises, a clear bell is heard ringing outside, slow and musical. By the light of a single torch, the Pilgrims are seen, some putting on their cloaks and hoods, some peering from behind the bed-curtains, others taking links from a tap-boy, who distributes them. These, as they are lit, throw an ever stronger light upon the grouped faces and contrasted garbs of the company. The* PARSON *is just waking the* PLOUGHMAN, *who drowses on a truckle-bed.*

PARSON

Up, brother; yon's the chapel bell.

PLOUGHMAN

It rings
For thee; thou art the parson, Jankin.

PARSON

Nay,
The preacher will be Wycliffe, old good Master
De Wycliffe.

MERCHANT

Old good Master Weak-liver!

PARSON

[*Turns angrily.*]

Sir!

MAN-OF-LAW

Old good Master Black-sheep!

PARSON

[*Turns.*]

Sir!

MONK

Old Nick!

PARSON

[*Turns.*]

Whom name you thus?

MONK

Your preacher. Faugh! The pope
Hath bann'd him with five bulls for heresy.

PLOUGHMAN

The old man hath a good grip, if he can
Hold five bulls by the horns.

MAN-OF-LAW

[*Aside to Priest.*]

An ignoramus!

BOTTLEJOHN

Dick, fetch a pint of moist ale from the cellar
For Master Bailey here.

[*Aside.*]

A small pint, mind,
And notch his tally.

DICK

[*Takes a stick from wall, notches it with his knife, and shows it to Bottlejohn.*]

Sixpence, sir, three farthings.

[*Dick then goes to the cellar door. As he opens it, he is grabbed within by the Miller, handed breathlessly to the Shipman, who claps his hands over the boy's mouth, and disappears with him below. The door then is closed, but at intervals it opens and the Miller's head is seen cautiously to emerge.*]

MERCHANT

This Wycliffe's gab hath hurt good trade. 'Twas him,
Six year ago, whose preaching made the poor folk
March up to London-town with Wat the Tyler,
And burn the gentry's houses.

DYER

Served 'em right!

PLOUGHMAN

God save Wat Tyler!

MONK

Peasant! Spit upon thee!

PARSON

Thou son of Antichrist!

MONK

Thou unhang'd Lollard!

BOTTLEJOHN

Sst! Sst! Good masters! Pray, sweet lordings, here
Comes Master Wycliffe.

[*Enter, in conversation,* WYCLIFFE *and* CHAUCER, *followed by* JOHANNA, *who seeks to draw* WYCLIFFE *away. The Pilgrims greet the last, some with shouts of welcome, others with hisses.*]

WYCLIFFE

[*To Chaucer.*]

Certes, sir, it may
Be as you say. — Good folk! good children! — Yet
To me this England is a gorgeous tabard,
Blazon'd with shining arms and kingly shields;
A cloth of gold, blood-dyed with heraldries
Of knightly joustings, presbyterial pomps,
And red-wine revellings; cunningly, i' the fringe,
Chaced round with little lutes and ladies' Cupids
To snuggle the horse-hair lining. This brave shirt,
This inward-goading cloth of gaiety,
The poor, starved peasant wears on his bare back —
A ghost, that plays the bridegroom with's despair.

PLOUGHMAN

[*Amongst sneers and applause.*]

Right!

WYCLIFFE

[*To Chaucer.*]

Friend, how seems it thee?

CHAUCER

Sir, with your pardon,
To me, our England is still "Merry England!"
Which nature cirqued with its green wall of seas
To be her home and hearth-stone; where no slave,
Though e'er he crept in her lap, was nursed of her;
But the least peasant, bow'd in lonely fief,
Might claim his free share in her dower of grace;
The hush, pied daisy for's society,
The o'erbubbling birds for mirth, the silly sheep
For innocence. — Mirth, friendship, innocence:
Where nature grants these three, what's left for envy?
These three, sir, serve for my theology.

MAN-OF-LAW

Parfoi! What is this man — a Papist? Is't
Some courtier?

FRANKLIN

Naw! He rings true Lollard, him.
They're friends.

PARDONER

[*Sniffs.*]

They say it is a London vintner.

WYCLIFFE

[*Aside, to Johanna, indicating Chaucer.*]

Not speak with him?

JOHANNA

On no account.

WYCLIFFE

But —

JOHANNA

'Tis
A villain. Pray, sir, come to chapel.

[*She hurries Wycliffe toward the door, where she is accosted, beseechingly, by the Squire.*]

SQUIRE

Mistress!

JOHANNA

Am I beset?

[*Indicating Chaucer.*]

Join your conspirator,
Signore!

[*She sweeps out.*]

SQUIRE

[*Following.*]

Grace, Madonna, grace!

[*Enter, right, Eglantine, with her priests.*]

CHAUCER

[*Aside, sees her.*]

My lady!

PARSON

[*To Ploughman.*]

Quick, mon, and light the way for Master Wycliffe.

[*Exeunt.*]

MERCHANT

[*To Man-of-Law.*]

Go you?

MAN-OF-LAW

[*Smiles ironically.*]

Hein? When an ass comes out of Oxford,
His braying charms great ears.

[*Lower.*]

They say he hath
A patron in John Gaunt.

[*They go out.*]

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Calls.*]

Dick! Drat thee, Dick!
Ned, fetch Dick from the cellar with that ale
For Master Bailey.

NED

[*Goes slowly.*]

Can I 'ave a candle?

[*The Host gives him such a look that he hastens on.*]

BOTTLEJOHN

[*To Bailey.*]

These 'prentices!

BAILEY

Haw! Haw!

MONK

[*To Pardoner.*]

Come, we'll go twit him.

[*Exeunt toward chapel.*]

[*As Ned is about to open the cellar door, a black face looks out at him.*]

NED

[*Running back.*]

Ow! Ow! A devil's head! I seed a spook!

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Seizing a ladle, drives him back.*]

Scat! And the devil swallow thee! Skedaddle! Feared o' the dark!

NED

[*Goes whimpering.*]

'E'll drub me wi' his thigh-bones.

[*Opening the door, he feels his way down. As the door closes, a faint scream comes from within.*]

CHAUCER

[*To Prioress, who, preceded by her three priests, is about to go out.*]

Madame, goes she to chapel?

PRIORESS

Paul, Joannes,
Keep close.

CHAUCER

Si chère Madame — if dear my lady
Would vouchsafe but a moment, till —

PRIORESS

[*Pausing, but not looking at Chaucer.*]

Eh bien?

CHAUCER

[*Confused.*]

The night is very beautiful.

PRIORESS

Joannes!

CHAUCER

That is — I bring you tidings of your brother.

JOANNES

What would Madame?

CHAUCER

The moon—

PRIORESS

[*To Joannes.*]

Go, go—to chapel.

JOANNES

But will Madame—

PRIORESS

Va! Va!—

[*Exeunt priests; she turns shyly to Chaucer.*]

Alors, Monsieur,
Vous dites mon frère?—

CHAUCER

Your brother—

[*Aside, as they go out.*]

Drown her brother!

WEAVER

[*To Dyer.*]

Come on!

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Blowing out a candle.*]

This preaching saveth tallow.

[*Calls.*]

Dick!

Ned! Slow knaves!

[*Exit right.*]

[*Cautiously, the cellar door is opened, and enter the Miller. He whistles softly; some one within whistles in answer.*]

MILLER

Be all gagged below there?

SHIPMAN

[*His head appearing.*]

Aye,

All's tight beneath the hatches. Is the deck clear?

[*Miller nods; Shipman disappears for an instant. Then the Miller bows low.*]

MILLER

This way, your lordship —

COOK

[*Appearing with Shipman.*]

'Save your Worship!

[*Enter* SUMMONER, MANCIPLE, *and* HUBERD, *the latter disguised as a chimney-sweep. Lastly,* ALISOUN *in the dress of the Knight.*]

ALL THE SWAINS

Hail,
Dan Roderigo!

ALISOUN

[*While the Swains assist in adjusting her disguise.*]

Good my squires and henchmen,
I thank you. — Roger, sweetheart, lace my boot there. —
Our journey hath been perilous and dark —
Bob, chuck, how sits my doublet? — but praise Mary,
I am preserved to greet my virgin sister; —
God send *she* like the flavour of my beard
Better than me.

FRIAR

Let me amend it, sweet!
[*Kisses her.*]

ALISOUN

Avaunt, vile chimney-sweep! Beshrew thee, Huberd
Love, wouldst thou swap complexions?
[*Looks in a pewter plate, while the Cook holds a candle.*]
Thy smut nose
Hath blotched the lily pallor of my brow
Like a crushed violet. Some powder, quick,
And touch it off.

FRIAR

[*From his robe and cowl, which the Shipman holds, extracts a rabbit's foot and touches up Alisoun's face, while the Manciple helps her on with a scarlet-lined mantle.*]

Sweet love, how liketh you
This cloak I stole?

ALISOUN

'Twill serve.

FRIAR

[*Bowing.*]

Your valet is
Your abject Ethiop slave.

MILLER

[*Kicks him.*]

Your nincumpoop!
Scarecat! Thou blacks thy friar's skin to save it,
Lest the fat vintner and the young squire catch thee
And flay it off.

FRIAR

Even so.

SUMMONER

By quid, let's blab, then.
He kissed her, and we'll blab.

COOK, MANCIPLE, AND SHIPMAN

Aye!

ALISOUN

Wo betide ye,
Then! Down! Kneel down — the batch of ye — and swear,
As ye have hopes to win this lily-white hand,
Ye will be brothers, till I win my bet.
Out with your oaths, now. Kiss my foot and say,

By Venus's lip,
And Alis's hip,
I swear to keep
This fellowship!

ALL

[*Severally trying to kiss her extended foot.*]

By Venus's lip,
And Alis's hip,
I swear to keep —

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Calls outside.*]

Ned! Dick!

ALISOUN

[*In low voice, to Swains.*]

Get out! Back to your cellar; guard
The knight and the two knaves. Whoever enters
Gag 'em and tie.

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Entering.*]

Dick! Ned! The devil take
All 'prentices!

ALISOUN

[*Retaining Friar.*]

Hist!

[*Staying the Miller.*]

Bob!

[*To the others.*]

Go! Go!

BOTTLEJOHN

I wonder
Was it a spook he saw! 'Tis dark.

[*Takes up an unlit candle.*]

ALISOUN

Mind, when he strikes
A light, I am the devil, and your feet
Are hoofs.

BOTTLEJOHN

Folk say they dwell in cellars.

FRIAR

Soft!
I'll sprinkle a pinch of this sal volatile
I' the candle flame.

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Lights candle.*]

I'll take my crucifix.

[*He is about to go toward the priedieu, when the Friar thrusts his hand over the candle flame. A vivid flash of light reveals his black face to Bottlejohn.*]

FRIAR

Succubus! Incubus!
Praestare omnibus!

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Drops the candle, which goes out.*]

Help!

ALISOUN

Silence!

[*On the hearth the Friar lights a dull red flame, which throws a flickering glow about the room.*]

BOTTLEJOHN

[*To Alisoun.*]

O! what art thou? Dost thou laugh?
What is thy name?

ALISOUN

My name is Lucifer.
These be my urchins, Belial and Moloch.
Salaam! Salaam!

FRIAR AND MILLER

[*Salaaming.*]

Hail, Mephistophilis!

ALISOUN

[*To Host.*]

What thing art thou? — Duck!

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Ducks as the Miller pricks him with a dirk.*]

I be Bottlejohn,
The host o' the One Nine-pin.

ALISOUN

Bottlejohn,
Thee and thy One Nine-pin I damn. For know,
Thy cellar is the attic over hell,

And hath been leaking bad ale through my ceiling
This seven year, and made a puddle deep
As Proserpina's garter in her bridal
Chamber, where thy two knaves —

BOTTLEJOHN

What! Ned and Dick?

ALISOUN

Came plumping through head-downwards into hell
Like bullfrogs in a tarn.

MILLER

And drowned! and drowned!
Shalt *thou* in thine own ale.

[*Leads him toward cellar.*]

BOTTLEJOHN

O Virgin!

FRIAR

[*At door, back.*]

Whist!
One comes.

BOTTLEJOHN

Help! help!

ALISOUN

[*To Miller.*]

Quick, Belial, lug thine ass
Into his stall. Instruct him with thy whittle
What manner devils we are, and when I clap
My hands thus and cry "Host!" then lead him forth.

[*Exeunt Miller and Bottlejohn into cellar. To Friar.*]

Meantime, my pixy, hide we here.

FRIAR

Sweet lord —

[*They hide in the cupboard. Enter, left, Chaucer and Prioress.*]

PRIORESS

Parlez toujours, Monsieur!
Parlez toujours!

CHAUCER

How silver falls the night!
The hills lie down like sheep; the young frog flutes;
The yellow-ammer, from his coppice, pipes
Drowsy rehearsals of his matin-song;
The latest swallow dips behind the stack.
What beauty dreams in silence! The white stars,
Like folded daisies in a summer field,
Sleep in their dew, and by yon primrose gap
In darkness' hedge, St. Ruth hath dropped her sickle.

PRIORESS

Nay, yonder's the new moon.

CHAUCER

But here's St. Ruth,
Whose pity hath reprieved a vintner's son.
Your nephew's verses —

PRIORESS

Pray speak not of them;
That wicked Friar Huberd was to blame.
But now —

[*Turning to the casement.*]

The moon, Monsieur; parlez, Monsieur!

CHAUCER

[*Aside.*]

"Parlez, Monsieur." How shall I trust myself?

[*Aloud.*]

I may not, dear Madame. If I should speak,
My heart would run in passages too sweet
For this cloy'd planet.

PRIORESS

[*Pointing through casement to the sky.*]

Mais — parlez, Monsieur.

CHAUCER

Yea, if perchance there were some *other* star —

PRIORESS

Some other star —

CHAUCER

Some star unsurfeited,
Some blessed star, where hot and lyric youth
Pours not swift torment in the veins of age;
Where Passion — gorgeous cenobite — blurs not
With fumid incense of his own hot breath
The hallow'd eyes of sweet Philosophy;
Where body battens not upon the soul,
But both are Reason's angels, and Love's self —
Pontifical in daisy-chains — doth hold
High mass at nature's May-pole; — if such star
There were in all God's heaven, and such indeed
Were ours, there would I speak and utter, not
"Dear Eglantine, I love you," but "We love."

PRIORESS

Monsieur, 'tis true.

CHAUCER

The simple truth, once said,
Is very sweet, Madame.

PRIORESS

Merci, Monsieur.

ALISOUN

Whist, Huberd; are they gone?

FRIAR

Nay.

ALISOUN

Did he kiss her?
Bones! Are they dumb!

FRIAR

Art jealous, dame?

ALISOUN

Shut up!

CHAUCER

[*At the window.*]

Some other star! Choose, lady, which is ours?

PRIORESS

Yonder cool star that hides its winking light
Like a maid that weeps — but not for heaviness.

CHAUCER

Ha! If I were Prometheus now, I'd filch it
From out the seventh crystal sphere for you
And 'close it in this locket.

[*Seizes her hand.*]

PRIORESS

Nay, that holds
My brother's hair.

CHAUCER

[*Dropping her hand, looks away into the night.*]

We dream.

PRIORESS

Of what, Monsieur?

CHAUCER

We dream that we are back in Eden garden
And that the gates are shut — and sin outside.

PRIORESS

Why, such in truth is love.

CHAUCER

Yes, such in truth
But not in fact, dear lady. Such sweet truth
Grows only on God's tree; we may behold
And crave immortally, but may not pluck it
Without the angel's scourge. — "When Adam delved" —
Aye, then he dragged both heaven and earth and hell
Along with him. — O God! this suzerain mansion
Where saints and crown'd philosophers discourse
Familiarly together as thy guests —
This ample palace of poesie, the mind —
Hath trap-doors sunk into a murky vault,
Where passion's serfs lie sprawling.

PRIORESS

I am afraid!

CHAUCER

Forgive me, O sweet lady! I seem not
All that I am.

PRIORESS

[*Timidly.*]

What are you?

CHAUCER

Do you ask?
Why, then, for this dull, English bulk, 'tis true
A London vintner gat it; but for this
My moving soul, I do believe it is
Some changeling sprite, the bastard of a god,
Sprung from Pan's loins and white Diana's side,
That, like a fawn, I fain must laugh and love
Where the sap runs; yet, like an anchorite,
Pore on the viewless beauty of a book:
Not more enamoured (when the sun is out)
O' the convent rose, than of the hoyden milkweed
Bold in my path. Life, in whatever cup,
To me is a love-potion. In one breath,
My heart hath pealed the chimes above St. Paul's
And rung an alewife's laughter.

ALISOUN

[*Aside to the Friar.*]

Bless his heart
And waistband! Heard ye that?

PRIORESS

[*Who has listened, lost.*]

To hear you speak
Is sweeter than the psalter. Do not stop.

CHAUCER

[*Aside, smiling.*]

Dear Lady Dreams!—

[*Aloud.*]

Hark! Footsteps from the chapel.

[*Goes to the door.*]

It is your nephew and his lady-love.
Let's step aside before I introduce you,
And profit by these pangs of "lyric youth."

[*Chaucer and the Prioress step aside, as enter, left, Johanna and the Squire.*]

SQUIRE

Stay!

JOHANNA

Leave me!

SQUIRE

Hear me!

JOHANNA

Is the house of prayer
No sanctuary that you drag me from it?

SQUIRE

Donna, the cloudy-pillar'd dome o' the air
Alone can roof a lover's house of prayer.

JOHANNA

More verses? Send 'em to your lady nun.

SQUIRE

O heartless bosom! Cold concave of pity!
Whet thy disdain upon the heart-shaped stone
Lodged, like a ruby, in that marble breast,
And slay me with the onyx of thine eye.

JOHANNA

Pray, did your Geoffrey write that?

SQUIRE

Do not scorn him.
He named you "Eglantine" because "Johanna"
Was not euphonious.

JOHANNA

Because "Johanna"
Was not —

SQUIRE

Euphonious. But "Eglantine" —

JOHANNA

But "Eglantine" was all symphonious.
"Johanna" — ha? — was not mellifluous
Enough to woo me! So a honeysuckle,
An eglantine, must be my proxy — ha?
Go! go! Hide in the night — Go! Kill thyself!

SQUIRE

[*At the door.*]

O sky! thy noon was a broad, glorious mirror,
Which now hath fallen from its frame and shattered;
And little stars, like points of glass, they prick me
That gather back my grains of crushèd joy.

JOHANNA

[*At the window.*]

O starry night! thou art Fortune's playing-card,
All bright emboss'd with little shining hearts
That dash our own with destiny. Oh, false!

[*Turns.*]

Go! — to your Eglantine!

SQUIRE

Johanna!

CHAUCER

[*Speaks from the darkness.*]

Hide, Cleopatra, thy Egyptian hair!

JOHANNA

Hark!

CHAUCER

Esther, let melt thy meekness as the snow. —

JOHANNA

[*Draws nearer to Squire.*]

What is 't?

CHAUCER

Hide, Ariadne, all thy beauties bare!

SQUIRE

Who speaks?

CHAUCER

Penelope and Marcia Cato,
Drown all your wifely virtues in the Po. —

JOHANNA

Good Aubrey, strike a light.

CHAUCER

Isold and Helen, veil your starlit eyes —
Johanna comes, that doth you jeopardise!

[*The Squire lights a candle, revealing Chaucer.*]

JOHANNA

O monster! It is he.

[*Chaucer takes the candle from the Squire's hand, and, holding it high, approaches Johanna, thereby throwing the Prioress into his own shadow.*]

SQUIRE

Nay, gentle sir!

CHAUCER

Laodamia, Hero, and Dido,
And Phyllis, dying for thy Demophon,
And Canace, betroth'd of Cambalo, —
Polixena, that made for love such moan,
Let envy gnaw your beauties to the bone;
Yea, Hypermnestra, swoon in envious sighs —
Johanna comes, that doth you jeopardise!

JOHANNA

Oh, thank you — both. Squire, I congratulate
Your cunning chivalry on luring me
From church to bait me in this bear-trap.

SQUIRE

Lady,
Upon my honour —

[*To Chaucer.*]

Good sir —

[*To Johanna.*]

Nay, fear nothing.
Indeed, if you but knew —

JOHANNA

[*Catching sight of Prioress.*]

If I but knew!
St. Ann! I know too much.

SQUIRE

You would be proud
To have him rhyme your name. Sir, I protest
Had I conceived how fair "Johanna" sounds
In verse —

CHAUCER

[*Sternly.*]

Hold, signorino! Was it thus
You bade me sonnetise your Eglantine?
You said yourself —

SQUIRE

In sooth, that "Eglantine"
Is sweeter.

JOHANNA

Ugh!

CHAUCER

There you were false. For know
As ocean-shells give back the mermaid's sigh,
The conches of a lover's ears should hold
Eternal murmurs of his mistress' name.
"Johanna" should have been thy conjure-word
To raise all spirits; thy muses' *nom de plume;*

"Johanna" should have learnt thy brook to purl,
Thy pine to sorrow, and thy lark to soar;
And nightingales, forswearing Tereus' name,
Have charmed thy wakeful midnight with "Johanna."

JOHANNA

[*To Chaucer.*]

Roland of Champions! Ringrazio!
Now, pray, what says the other lady?

SQUIRE

The other?

JOHANNA

[*To Prioress.*]

Dame Eglantine, your most obsequious.

PRIORESS

Votre servante. — I also, Mademoiselle,
Have been at court.

JOHANNA

Does not Madame applaud, then,
This vintner's courtly eloquence?

PRIORESS

I think
Monsieur will soon explain how this good youth
And I are dearly tied unto each other.

SQUIRE

What! I — and you, Madame?

JOHANNA

It seems the trap
Hath caught the hunters.

[*Aside.*]

Oh, my heart!

SQUIRE

I swear
I do not know this lady.

JOHANNA

What! you swear!

[*Aside.*]

Not perjury?

SQUIRE

I swear that we are strangers;
Of no relationship, and least of love.

JOHANNA

Oh, Aubrey, is this true?

SQUIRE

Why, Mistress —

CHAUCER

[*Aside to Squire.*]

Soft!
Walk with this nun a moment.

SQUIRE

Sir?

CHAUCER

Dost trust me?

SQUIRE

Yes, but —

CHAUCER

[*Indicating Johanna.*]

I'll reconcile her.

[*Aside to Prioress.*]

Tell him all,
Madame. Leave us alone a moment.

SQUIRE

But —

CHAUCER

[*Aloud.*]

I will not play the hypocrite.

PRIORESS

[*To Squire, as they go out.*]

Dear Aubrey —

JOHANNA

"Dear Aubrey!" Gone! gone! and with her. O base
Conspiracy! — To leave me!

[*To Chaucer.*]

Stand aside!

CHAUCER

Nay, do not follow.

JOHANNA

I? I follow *her?*
Follow the lost Francesca into Limbo!
She's damned. I seek my ward, De Wycliffe.

CHAUCER

Stay!

JOHANNA

St. Winifred! You'll force — ?

CHAUCER

Donna, my heart
Bleeds tears for you.

JOHANNA

Stand by!

CHAUCER

That one so young,
So seeming virtuous —

JOHANNA

"So seeming" — thanks!

CHAUCER

As this young squire should, at one look from his —
Should, at one look, forsake your ladyship
For his — alas! But such is man! The bonds
Which nature forges chain us to the flesh,
Though angels pry the links.

JOHANNA

The bonds which nature? —

CHAUCER

Yes, nature: 'tis not love. Had it been love,
Would he have turned, even in his vows of truth,
And left you with his — ah! it chokes me. Nay,
Go, go, great marchioness, seek out your ward;
I crave your pardon.

[*Bowing, he steps aside. Johanna, passing disdainfully to the door, there pauses, and turns to Chaucer, as though he had spoken.*]

JOHANNA

Well?

[*Chaucer retires right.*]

'Tis very dark.

[*Returning.*]

I will wait here.

CHAUCER

In sadness, honoured lady,
I take my leave.

[*He goes to the door; Johanna rises uneasily.*]

Yet I beseech your grace
Will never hint to that poor youth, my friend,
The secret I let slip.

JOHANNA

[*Aside.*]

"Let slip!" The booby!—
He thinks he's told me who she is. Soft! *now*
I'll worm it out.

[*Aloud.*]

Wait; if I promise never
To hint the thing we know — you understand.

CHAUCER

That's it.

JOHANNA

One moment, Master Geoffrey. I
Have rallied you somewhat on your paternal
Vintage.

CHAUCER

To be hit by your Grace's wit
Is to die smiling.

JOHANNA

[*Aside.*]

How the big fish bites!

[*Aloud, effusively.*]

But you'll forgive me? 'Tis my nature, those
To banter whom I best adore.

[*Detaching a knot of ribbon from her gown, she offers it to Chaucer.*]

Pray, sir, —

CHAUCER

For me? — A love-knot! By your Grace's favours
I am bewildered.

JOHANNA

Keep it as a pledge —
For you are Aubrey's friend, my Aubrey's friend —
As pledge that I will never, so help me Heaven,
Reveal to him my knowledge of his secret,
How Eglantine is his — oh, word it for me,
For I am heartsick.

CHAUCER

Trust me, honoured lady,
You have done bravely. For did he suspect
That I have even whispered to you how
That nun, whose sensuous name he bade me rhyme
In verses meant for you, that Prioress,
Whose cloistral hand even now, lock'd in his palm,
Leads here your Aubrey, how that vestal maid
Hath lived for months, nay years, your lover's — oh!

JOHANNA

[*Seizes Chaucer's arm.*]

His *what?* In God's name, speak it! His —

CHAUCER

His aunt!

[*Blows out the candle.*]

JOHANNA

His *aunt?*

CHAUCER

[*Going off in the dark.*]

O shire of Kent! thou shire of Kent!
To sit with thee in parliament
Doth not content
Me, verayment,
Like laughing at lovers after Lent.
Haha! Hahaha!

[*Exit.*]

Ho! Shire of Kent!

JOHANNA

So — Kent? He mocks my title, doth he?
O gall! If he have made a fool of me —
Yet, if he've made a fool of me, O sweet,
Sweet gall!

SQUIRE

[*Outside.*]

Johanna!

JOHANNA

Aubrey!

SQUIRE

[*Returning with Prioress.*]

He hath told thee?

JOHANNA

Nay, hath he told me *true?*

SQUIRE

This is my aunt,
Dame Eglantine, my father's sister.

ALISOUN

[*Aside.*]

Death!
We must be quick.

FRIAR

[*Aside.*]

I'll win thy wager for thee.

[*Exit Friar at door, front left.*]

PRIORESS

[*Extending her hand to Johanna.*]

My nephew tells me you and he —

JOHANNA

Madame,
I blush to think of my late rudeness; 'twas
My jealousy. Yet you should pardon it;
For you that wear St. Chastity's safe veil
Can never know how blind St. Cupid plagues
The eyes of worldlings.

PRIORESS

No?

SQUIRE

Love, you forgive me?

[*Reënter Chaucer.*]

JOHANNA

Forgive you? By my heart — I'll think about it.
Here comes our fool. Come hither, What's-your-name.

CHAUCER

[*Coming forward with the love-knot.*]

Your Grace's secret-monger.

JOHANNA

Tut! tut!

[*Embarrassed, motions him to put it away.*]

Rhymester,
If thou wilt come to court, I'll have thee made
Court-fool.

SQUIRE

[*Aside.*]

O mistress, hush!

JOHANNA

A cask of thy
Diameter should keep King Richard drunk
With laughter for a twelvemonth. Cask, I swear it,
Thou shalt be made court-fool.

SQUIRE

[*Aside to Chaucer.*]

She doth not mean it.

PRIORESS

[*Aside to Squire.*]

Nephew, I cannot quite approve your choice.

JOHANNA

Nay, keep my knot; my favour is renewed.
I'll sue the king myself at Canterbury
To swaddle thee in motley.

[*Chaucer laughs aside.*]

— Well, no thanks?

CHAUCER

Lady, pray God I live to see that day.

JOHANNA

Amen. Now, Aubrey, where's your father? Let's
Make merry all together.

PRIORESS

True, my brother;
Went he to chapel?

SQUIRE

Ladies, I am 'shamed
To make confession of my selfishness:
To-day, all day, in the sweet day and night
Of my own thoughts I have been wandering.
I have not seen my father since this morning.
I'll go and seek him now.

CHAUCER

Nay, boy, remain.
Doubtless he's gone to chapel. I will find him
And bring him to you here. First, though, let me

Anticipate my fool's prerogative
And play the father to another's bairns,
This vixen girl and boy.

[*With an affectionate smile he draws Johanna and Aubrey together and kisses them.*]

God bless 'em both!

PRIORESS

[*Aside.*]

St. Loy! No more?

JOHANNA

Dear fool, thou'rt not so old.
Come now, how old?

CHAUCER

Ah, lass, my crop is rowen.
When grey hairs creep like yarrow into clover,
Farewell, green June! Thy growing days be over.

[*Aside.*]

Bewitching Eglantine!

[*Exit left.*]

PRIORESS

[*At the casement, aside.*]

Some other star!

[*Aloud.*]

Nephew!

[*The Squire and Johanna stand absorbed in their own whisperings.*]

Nephew!

SQUIRE

Madame!

PRIORESS

I pray you, tell
Your father, when he comes, I am retired
A moment to my room.

SQUIRE

I will, Madame.

[*Exit Prioress, right.*]

My lady, we're alone.

JOHANNA

Alas, then come,
Sit and be sad.

[*She sits in the niche by the fireplace.*]

SQUIRE

Sad? Must I wear a mask, then?
Mistress! Mistress, masks fall away from love
Like husks from buds in April. By love's light
Lovers can look through mountains to their joy
As through these black beams I see heaven. Nay,
Hear me! When I have won my spurs —

FRIAR

[*Sings within.*]

What, ho! · What, ho!
Dan Cupido!
A spurless knight usurps thy halls. —

JOHANNA

What's that?

SQUIRE

The friar! 'Tis his voice.

FRIAR

[*Sings within.*]

Thy fortress falls,
And all her rosèd charms —

JOHANNA

Is't in the cellar?

SQUIRE

Or the wall?

[*They look up the chimney.*]

FRIAR

[*Sings within.*]

To arms, Dan Cupido! To arms,
Dan Cupido!

[*With a rush of soot, he falls into the fireplace.*]

Bon soir!

JOHANNA

'Od's fiends!

SQUIRE

[*Seizing Friar, drags him forth.*]

Sneak thief, at last I have thee — What!
A chimney-sweep?

FRIAR

Did scare the ladykin?

SQUIRE

Was't thou that sung?

FRIAR

Sung-la?

JOHANNA

[*Brushing herself off.*]

My taffeta!

SQUIRE

Sing! Didst thou sing?

FRIAR

Oh, sing! You mean the friar, sir.

SQUIRE

[*Peremptorily.*]

Where?

FRIAR

In the cellar. He's a-hiding, sir.

SQUIRE

I warrant him. Here —

[*Gives Friar a coin.*]

Come, show me the scoundrel.

FRIAR

[*Examining coin.*]

A noble!

[*Sings.*]

Oh, rare
Sweet miller,
Lady-killer,
Not there, not there!

SQUIRE

[*Eyeing Friar with suspicion.*]

What?

[*The Miller slips stealthily from the cellar door and joins Alisoun in the cupboard.*]

FRIAR

Was't so he sung, sir?

SQUIRE

Yes.

JOHANNA

[*Still brushing her gown.*]

Ruined!

FRIAR

Sir, follow, sir. I know him well.
A begging friar?

SQUIRE

Yes.—One moment, Mistress.—
I'll flay the beggar. Now!

FRIAR

[*The Friar opens cellar door; Squire snatches his candle and precedes him.*]

A sneaking friar—
A noble!—a swindling, skulking, lying friar.

[*Aside to Bob Miller, who joins him from the cupboard.*]

O rare Bob-up-and-down!

[*Exeunt; Alisoun leaves the cupboard and exit stealthily at door, left front.*]

JOHANNA

Stay; are they gone?
Mass! mass! I'm spotted worse than ink. And kneel
In Canterbury kirk in such a gown!
I'll eat it first. Oh, Lord! Lord, now who comes?

[*Enter, left back, the Canon's Yeoman and the Carpenter; after whom the Wife of Bath, disguised.*]

ALISOUN

Good fellow, you there, can you propagate
Unto my vision — a young prioress?

CANON'S YEOMAN

No, sir, I cannot.

ALISOUN

Or a marchioness?

[*The pilgrims pass on.*]

JOHANNA

[*Aside.*]

A marchioness!

ALISOUN

[*Twirling her sword-scabbard.*]

Hum! Hum!

CARPENTER

How went the sermon?

CANON'S YEOMAN

God's blood! Old Wycliffe hammered the pope flat.
The pulpit rang like a hot anvil.

CARPENTER

Aye,
There'll be skulls cracked yet.

[*Exeunt right.*]

ALISOUN

[*To Johanna.*]

Amorous Minerva!

JOHANNA

Signor!

[*Aside.*]

My left sleeve's clean.

ALISOUN

I have a son,
Whose aunt —

JOHANNA

Are you the Knight of Algezir?

ALISOUN

I am — Dan Roderigo d'Algezir.

JOHANNA

My Aubrey's father.

ALISOUN

Bones! Are you Johanna?

JOHANNA

[*Aside.*]

Bones!

ALISOUN

Corpus arms! it sticks me to the heart
To gaze on your sweet face, my dear.

JOHANNA

[*Aside.*]

My dear!

ALISOUN

Ah! the fat rogue! He said your face was worth
Unbuckling an off eye to pop it in;
But such a pretty finch!

JOHANNA

Finch! Sir, perhaps
You are deceived in me. — Who sent you here?

ALISOUN

Yon chum of that sweet spindle-shanks, my son —
Yon rhymester, Master Geoffrey.

JOHANNA

Yes; 'twas he.

[*Aside.*]

Saints! is *this* Aubrey's father?

[*Aloud.*]

Doubtless, sir,
There's no mistake. Your sister left you word —

ALISOUN

O villain! Aye, though I ha' bred him! What
Though 'tis my own son — villain! God's teeth!

JOHANNA

Sir!

ALISOUN

Your pardon, dainty dame. Before I speak
I do not rinse my mouth in oleander.
I am a blunt knight. Nay, I cannot sigh
A simoon hot with sonnets like my son.
I am a blunt knight who, on Satan's heel,
Hath rode it and strode it, wenched it, wived it, and knived it,
Booted and footed 't, till — by Venus' shoestring,
I be a blunt and rough but honest soldier.

JOHANNA

Signore, I believe it.

ALISOUN

Blunt's the word, then;
And here's the blunt point. You're deceived.

JOHANNA

By whom?

ALISOUN

By Aubrey.

JOHANNA

What!

ALISOUN

Aye, by my smiling son
Wi' the pretty curls. Where is he now?

JOHANNA

Why, he —
He's gone to find the friar.

ALISOUN

Aye.

JOHANNA

Good Heaven!
Can he have harmed him?

ALISOUN

Who — the friar? The friar's
His pal — his pal; and so is Geoffrey; aye,
And that lascivious, Latin-singing nun —

JOHANNA

What! Eglantine?

ALISOUN

Yes, she; those four! Child, child,
Wouldst not believe it, how they've sneaked and schemed,
Plotted my life, aye, for my money. But
'Twas lust, lust egged him on. Oh God! my son!
And 'twas a cherub 'fore this Geoffrey warped him!

JOHANNA

[*To herself.*]
They whispered here: and there she said "Dear Aubrey."

ALISOUN

And their disguises; oh, you'd not believe it!
That devil friar plays the chimney-sweep.
And —

JOHANNA

Chimney-sweep! 'Twas he, then, sung? Oh, come;
Help!

ALISOUN

Where?

JOHANNA

They're in the cellar.

ALISOUN

Like enough;
They're plotting, plotting. God's wounds! 'Tis a trap.
Where be they all? Geoffrey to send me here —
My son to leave you with the friar — Ha!
They're with that sly, deceptive Prioress;
'Tis she —

JOHANNA

Why, she's your sister.

ALISOUN

[*As if taken back.*]

What — my sister!
Is *she* the Prioress? *She* Eglantine?

JOHANNA

Yes, yes; and she, too, left upon a pretext.
Sir Roderigo, say, what shall we do?

ALISOUN

My sister — and my son!

JOHANNA

[*Calls.*]

Aubrey! — no answer?

Aubrey!

ALISOUN

My son and sister!

JOHANNA

Oh, poor soldier!

ALISOUN

Oh, monstrous brood, hatched in a vampire's nest!
But I will be revenged. Go to your room;
Lock fast the door; but when I call, "A brooch,
A brooch!" come forth and raise the house.

JOHANNA

Why "brooch"?

ALISOUN

A watchword. Quick; go! I hear footsteps. Go!

[*Urges her toward door, right back.*]

Blunt is the word; your presence dangers me —
Your room. No, no, I fear not.

JOHANNA

Poor Sir Roderick!

[*Exit; Alisoun shuts door; voices outside, left.*]

ALISOUN

A miss is as good's a mile.

REEVE

[*Outside.*]

Where went your knight?

[*Enter Reeve, Doctor, and Chaucer.*]

CHAUCER

To chapel.

REEVE

Na, na, na; I saw him not.

CHAUCER

[*To Doctor.*]

Nor you?

DOCTOR

A knight, say you, from the Holy Land?

CHAUCER

Yes, a crusader.

DOCTOR

[*Points at Alisoun.*]

Is that he?

CHAUCER

Ah, thank you;

[*Starts forward, but sees he is mistaken.*]

Nay, 'tis another man.

DOCTOR

Good even, sir.

REEVE

[*To Doctor.*]

'Twas the first time I heard the devil preach
In chapel.

DOCTOR

Wycliffe?

REEVE

[*Nods.*]

Curse him and his Lollards!

[*Exeunt, right front.*]

CHAUCER

[*Follows them to door, and calls.*]

Aubrey!

ALISOUN

[*Claps her hands.*]

Host!

CHAUCER

Signorino!

ALISOUN

Host here!

[*Enter from cellar the Miller and Bottlejohn. As the door is closing, the chink is filled with the faces of the Swains, threatening Bottlejohn.*]

MILLER

[*His dagger drawn, aside to Bottlejohn.*]

Mum!

Quick! Be thy ribs good whetstones?

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Ducking to Alisoun.*]

Here, sweet lording.

ALISOUN

Thou'rt slow.

MILLER

[*Aside.*]

Ribs!

BOTTLEJOHN

Slow, sweet lording.

ALISOUN

Tell me, host,
Hast thou residing in this hostelry
A gentle prioress?

CHAUCER

[*Aside.*]

What?

MILLER

[*Aside to Bottlejohn, sharpening his dagger on an ale-mug.*]

Whetstones!

BOTTLEJOHN

Aye,
Sweet lording.

ALISOUN

Good; go tell her that her brother
Awaits her here.

CHAUCER

[*Aside.*]

Her brother!

[*Draws nearer.*]

HOST

Aye, sweet lording.

[*Starts for door, right back, Miller following.*]

ALISOUN

Her brother, say — Dan Roderigo.

BOTTLEJOHN

Aye,
Sweet lording.

MILLER

Host, hast thou a whetstone in
Thy pocket?

BOTTLEJOHN

Aye, sweet lording.

MILLER

[*Winking at Alisoun.*]

"Aye, sweet lording."

[*Exeunt Bottlejohn and Miller.*]

[*Alisoun ignores Chaucer's presence.*]

CHAUCER

[*Approaching her.*]

Your pardon, sir, I trespass. By your cross
You come —

ALISOUN

From Palestine. Well met. You, friend?

CHAUCER

Nay, I'm a door-mouse, sir; a doze-at-home.
My home's near by at Greenwich. You have friends—
Friends at the inn?

ALISOUN

A friend, sir; a fair friend;
By Jupiter, a sweet friend.

CHAUCER

Ah!

ALISOUN

A sister.

She is a nun.

CHAUCER

Good God!

ALISOUN

A prioress.

CHAUCER

It cannot be!

ALISOUN

Signor!

CHAUCER

Her name? Her name?

ALISOUN

What's that to you — her name?

CHAUCER

[*Disconcerted.*]

It may be —

ALISOUN

Ah!

Perhaps you know her — what? 'Tis Eglantine.

CHAUCER

Impossible! — Sir, pardon me; I must
Have made some strange mistake.

ALISOUN

Nay, friend; I guess
'Tis I have made the blunder.

CHAUCER

You, sir?

ALISOUN

Sooth,
I might as well stick both feet in the mire
And wade across my blushes. We old lads
With beards, who sees our blushes, what? So, then,
This prioress, she is not just my sister.

CHAUCER

No?

ALISOUN

No.

CHAUCER

What then?

ALISOUN

Vous savez bien, these nuns,
When they would have a friend, they clepe him "brother."
Especially on holy pilgrimage
It hath a proper sound: "My *brother* meets me;
My *brother* is a knight." You cannot blame 'em;
'Tis more discreet; we men must humour 'em.
Therefore this little honeysuckle nun
Doth take delight to call me *brother*.

CHAUCER

Liar!

[*As Chaucer lifts his hand about to strike Alisoun, she raises hers to guard; seizing it, he beholds her ring.*]

What! — "Amor vincit omnia." — Even her!

ALISOUN

Take back your lie!

CHAUCER

That ring — tell me — that ring!

ALISOUN

St. Madrian! It is my love-ring. She,
My sweet nun, gave it me. She wears a brooch
To match it, on her wrist.

[*Enter, right, Bottlejohn and Miller.*]

BOTTLEJOHN

The Prioress,
Sweet lording.

[*Enter the Prioress.*]

PRIORESS

Brother! Welcome, brother!

CHAUCER

No!
God! God! I'll not believe it. Aubrey! Aubrey!

[*Exit, left.*]

ALISOUN

My pretty virgin sister!

PRIORESS

[*Gives her hand, reticently.*]

Roderigo!

[*Looking after Chaucer.*]

He need not, sure, have gone.

ALISOUN

Put up thy chin,
My snow-white dove. Aha, but thou art grown!
The silver slip o' girlhood that I kissed
Good-by when I set out for Palestine
Hath mellowed into golden womanhood.
Give me thy lips.

PRIORESS

Nay, brother, nay; my vows!
I may not kiss a man.

ALISOUN

Toot! never fear, then;
Thou shalt not break thy vows against *my* beard.
What, I'm thy brother; come!

PRIORESS

Adieu, mon frère.

ALISOUN

Soft, soft, my startled fawn. You need not jump
Because your brother is a true crusader.
Or didst thou fancy I was cut in stone,
With my cold gauntlets crossed above my breast,
Like a dumb, marble knight upon a tomb?
Art not thou glad to see me, sister?

PRIORESS

Yes,
Mon frère. Forgive me, I had thought — You see,
My nephew — 'tis a pretty mannered youth;
You're not alike, are you?

ALISOUN

[*Laughing.*]

By Peter's toe,
I hope not. Saints deliver me from being
A new-hatched chicken's feather.

PRIORESS

What! your son?

ALISOUN

Next, thou'll be wishing I were like that fellow
That fetched me here — yon what's-his-name, yon
Geoffrey.

PRIORESS

Why, 'tis a noble gentleman.

[*Enter, from cellar door, Summoner, Shipman, Cook, Friar, and Manciple; they look on.*]

ALISOUN

Hoho!
Your noble gentleman! Why, harkee, sweet;
He told me he's betrothèd to an ale-wife.

PRIORESS

He told you — when?

ALISOUN

Just now, coming from chapel.

PRIORESS

Her name?

ALISOUN

[*Ruminating, winks at the Swains.*]

What was her name, now? — Alisoun,
The Wife of Bath, they call her.

PRIORESS

O gran Dieu!
That *person!*

ALISOUN

Person! God wot, 'twas not so
Your Geoffrey called her. "Alisoun," quoth he;
"My lily Alisoun, my fresh wild-rose,
My cowslip in the slough of womankind,
Bright Alisoun shall be my bride."

PRIORESS

[*Throwing herself into Alisoun's arms.*]

Mon frère!
Oh, keep me safe, mon frère!
[*She hides her face.*]

MILLER

[*Laughing.*]

By Corpus bones!

SUMMONER

Look!

SHIPMAN

Hold me up!

BOTTLEJOHN

[*Whispers.*]

Lady, beware!

MILLER

Mum!

PRIORESS

What Are these?

ALISOUN

Begone, you varlets!

COOK

[*Bowing.*]

Yes, sweet lord.

SUMMONER

We know our betters.

[*They withdraw a little.*]

ALISOUN

Come, what cheer, my girl? Hath that churl Geoffrey wronged thee?

PRIORESS

No, no, no!

ALISOUN

Nay, if the churl hath wronged thee, by this locket—

PRIORESS

Swear not by that. *He* swore by that.

ALISOUN

O vile!
He swore by this — the brooch that holds my hair,
Thy brother's hair?

PRIORESS

But, Roderigo —

ALISOUN

What!
Give't here! Or maybe thou hast promised it
To him?

PRIORESS

No, no, mon frère. Here, take it — keep it.

ALISOUN

So! By this brooch —

[*Aside.*]

Now, lads, learn how to woo!
Now, by this golden brooch of Eglantine,
And by this little, slender wrist of pearl,
Where once it hung; and by the limpid eyes
Of Eglantine, and by her ripe, red mouth,
Yea, by the warm white doves which are her breasts
And flutter at the heart of Eglantine,
I swear I will be ever Eglantine's
And lacerate the foes of Eglantine.

PRIORESS

Brother, such words —

ALISOUN

Call me not brother, sweet;
A brother's blood is lukewarm in his limbs,
But mine for thee is lightning. Look at me!
Was Jove a finer figure of a man
Than me? Had Agamemnon such an arm,
Or Hector such a leg?

PRIORESS

Forbear! Forbear!

ALISOUN

Alack, she scorns me. Stay, Venus of virgins!
Why dost thou wimple all the lovely dawn
Of thy young body in this veil of night?
Why wilt thou cork thy sweetness up, and, like
A mummy, wrapped in rose and ivory,
Store all thy beauty till the judgment-day?
God did not paint thee on a window-glass.
Step down from thy cold chapel, rosy saint,
And take thy true-knight in thine arms.

PRIORESS

Help! help!

BOTTLEJOHN

Pray, lady, pray! It is Satanas! They
Be devils all!

ALISOUN

Love — Eglantine — I kneel.

PRIORESS

Joannes! Marcus!

[*Seizing her crucifix.*]

Tibi, Domine!

[*Enter, right, Joannes, Marcus, and Paulus. They are immediately driven back by the Summoner, Shipman, and Cook.*]

JOANNES

Madame.

SHIPMAN

Come on!

PRIORESS

Help! Save me!

[*Enter Chaucer, left.*]

ALISOUN

[*To Prioress.*]

Lovely nymph,

Come to my arms —

CHAUCER

[*To Alisoun, with his sword drawn.*]

Embrace me.

PRIORESS

[*Goes to his protection.*]

Cher monsieur!

ALISOUN

God save you, Master Geoffrey.

CHAUCER

Draw!

FRIAR

[*Aside.*]

Lord! Lord!
The pot boils. Now to add the salt and pepper.

[*Exit down cellar.*]

[*Enter, left back, in quick succession, all the pilgrims, returning with their links from chapel.*]

PRIORESS

[*To Chaucer.*]

Monsieur —

CHAUCER

[*To Alisoun.*]

Draw!

PRIORESS

Do not fight, Monsieur!

CHAUCER

Wilt draw, I say?

ALISOUN

Draw what? Draw *you?* Merci,
I'm not a dray-horse.

CHAUCER

Is this man your brother?

PRIORESS

Oh, sir, I know not; but he hath insulted —

CHAUCER

Insulted you? Enough. By all the devils,
Defend yourself!

ALISOUN

[*Drawing.*]

To arms then, sweet Achilles.

[*They fight. Re-enter right, Shipman, Summoner, and Cook. They rush to Alisoun's aid.*]

SHIPMAN

Boardside the fat churl.

PILGRIMS

Come! A fight!

FRANKLIN

[*Entering.*]

Who are they?

MERCHANT

A Lollard and Papist.

PRIORESS

Stay them! Stop them!

PILGRIMS

Down with the Papists!

PRIORESS

Oh, St. Loy!

CHAUCER

[*To the crowd.*]

Stand off!

PILGRIMS

Down with the Lollards!

[*They close in and fight confusedly with staves.*]

ALISOUN

[*Holding up the locket.*]

Hold! A brooch! A brooch!

CHAUCER

I'll make thee yield it, ruffian.

[*From the cellar enter the Friar and the Squire, the latter sword in hand, fragments of cut ropes still clinging to him.*]

SQUIRE

[*To Chaucer—plunging at Alisoun.*]

Sir, I'm with you.

[*Enter, right, Johanna.*]

ALISOUN

[*To Squire.*]

Unnatural son!

JOHANNA

Help!

[*Throws herself between them.*]

Brave Sir Roderick!

[*To Squire.*]

Shame! Shame! Your father's blood?

SQUIRE

You, lady?

[*Enter, left, Wycliffe.*]

WYCLIFFE

[*To the pilgrims.*]

Peace!

CHAUCER

You, marchioness! What does this mean?

ALISOUN

[*Stripping off her beard and wig — her own hair falling over her shoulders — snatches a warming-pan from the chimney, and confronts Chaucer.*]

Sweet Geoffrey,
It means this pan shall warm our wedding sheets.

MILLER

What devil!

CHAUCER

Alisoun! — My bet is lost.

FRANKLIN

The Wife of Bath!

[*The pilgrims crowd round and laugh.*]

JOHANNA

[*Turning away.*]

Impostors!

ALISOUN

[*To Chaucer.*]

Come, sweet chuck,
And kiss the brooch that hath betrothed our hearts.

PRIORESS

M'sieur, is this true?

[*As Chaucer turns to the Prioress in a kind of blank dismay, enter, from the cellar, swathed in a long gown, the real Knight and the Friar.*]

KNIGHT

[*To Friar.*]

Where?

[*Friar points to Prioress; he advances.*]

Eglantine!

PRIORESS

[*Aghast at this apparition, runs to the priedieu.*]

No more!

CHAUCER

[*Struck, at a flash, by this medley of incongruities, bursts into laughter, and seizing an ale mug, lifts it high.*]

Alis, I drink to thee and woman's wit.

FRIAR

God save the vintner and the Wife of Bath!

PILGRIMS

[*Shout.*]

God save the vintner and the Wife of Bath!

ALISOUN

[*Sharing the ale mug with Chaucer.*]

Sweetheart!

Explicit pars tertia.

ACT FOURTH

"And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blisful martyr for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seke."

ACT IV

TIME: The next day.

SCENE: Before the west front of Canterbury Cathedral, gorgeously decorated with tapestries, hatchments, and cloth of gold. Grouped nearby are temporary booths of venders, gaily trimmed.

Many pilgrims are assembled; others keep arriving from different directions, talking, praying, and sight-seeing. At the Cathedral door a Priest blesses, with a sprengel, those who enter.

FIRST VENDER

Relics! Souvenirs!

SECOND VENDER

Blood of the blissful martyr!

A BLACK FRIAR

[*To Bailey, the Host.*]

A guide, Sir Hosteler?

HOST

Be off!

SECOND VENDER

[*To the Guild-men.*]

Ampulles?

WEAVER

What are they?

SECOND VENDER

Leaden bottles; look!

DYER

What's in 'em?

SECOND VENDER

Drops from the holy well: St. Thomas' well,
That turned four times to blood and once to milk;
Good for the humours, gout, and falling-sickness.

WEAVER

[*Buys some.*]

Here.

SECOND VENDER

Eightpence.

[*The Guild-men buy, and arrange the leaden vials in their hats.*]

FIRST VENDER

Vernicles! St. Peter's keys!

CARPENTER

[*Examining a purchase.*]

What's written on this brooch, sir?

CLERK

"Caput Thomæ."

PLOUGHMAN

[*Staring at a statue in a niche of the Cathedral.*]

Is he alive?

FRANKLIN

Naw; he's just petrified.

BLACK FRIAR

[*To Merchant.*]

A guide, sir?

MERCHANT

No.

BLACK FRIAR

Show you the spot, sir, where
The four knights murdered Becket, in the year
Eleven hundred seventy, at dusk,
The twenty-ninth day of December —

A GREY FRIAR

Nay, sir,
I'll show you the true statue of the Virgin
That talked to holy Thomas when he prayed.

BLACK FRIAR

St. George's arm, sir! Come; I'll let you kiss it.

GREY FRIAR

This way; the tomb of Edward the Black Prince.

[*Both seize Merchant and tug him.*]

MERCHANT

[*Struggling.*]

Mine host!

HOST

[*Coming up.*]

Pack off!

PARSON

[*To Ploughman.*]

What May-day queen comes here?

[*Outside, left, are heard girls' voices singing; enter, dressed richly and gaily,* CHAUCER, *surrounded by a bevy of Canterbury brooch-girls, who have wreathed him with flowers and long ribbons, by which they pull him; plying him with their wares, while he attempts to talk aside with the Man-of-Law, who accompanies him.*]

CANTERBURY GIRLS

[*Sing.*]

High and low,
Low and high,
Be they merry,
Be they glum,
When they come
To Canterbury,
Canterbury,
Canterbury,
Some low,
Some high,
Canterbury brooches buy.

CHAUCER

Sweet ladies — nay, sweet Canterbury muses,
Not Hercules amid the Lydian nymphs
Was ravished by more dulcet harmonies.

[*To Man-of-Law.*]

You sergeants-of-the-law are subtle men.

MAN-OF-LAW

We have a knack — a knack, sir.

A GIRL

Pull his sleeve.

ANOTHER

They say you are a bridegroom. Is it true, sir?

CHAUCER

Your Canterbury skies rain compliments.

[*To Man-of-Law.*]

Pray! —

MAN-OF-LAW

[*Taking money from Chaucer.*]

If you insist, my lord.

CHAUCER

Nay, not "my lord."

How stands the case?

MAN-OF-LAW

You say this wife hath been

Some eight times wedded?

CHAUCER

Five times.

A GIRL

Stop their gossip,

He's talking business.

ALL THE GIRLS

Brooches! Souvenirs!

CHAUCER

[*Examining their wares.*]

How much?

A GIRL

This? Two-pence.

MAN-OF-LAW

Five times — five times. Well!

CHAUCER

[*To Man-of-Law, giving more money.*]

Prithee —

MAN-OF-LAW

If you insist.

A GIRL

[*To Chaucer.*]

Mine for a penny.

MAN-OF-LAW

Why, then, the case stands thus: By English law,
No woman may be wedded but five times.
By law, sir, a sixth husband is proscribed.

CHAUCER

You'll vouch for that? By law?

MAN-OF-LAW

Sir, I will quote
You precedents from William Conqueror.

CHAUCER

Alas, my nuptials! And I would have made
So neat a bridegroom!

A GIRL

Come, sir, will you buy?

ANOTHER

Take mine!

ALL THE GIRLS

Mine! Mine! Mine!

CHAUCER

Nay, fresh goddesses,
Your graces are more heavenly souvenirs!
Sell to me your glances
For a poet's fancies!
[*To a girl with yellow hair.*]
You, Midas' daughter, how much for this gold?

THE GIRL

'Tis not for sale, sir.

CHAUCER

[*To another.*]
How much for that rose?

THE GIRL

What rose?

CHAUCER

Your smile.

THE GIRL

Gratis — for you, sir.

[*Enter Alisoun, attired gorgeously as a bride.*]

ALL THE GIRLS

Oh-h!

CHAUCER

How much, Olympians, for your nectar'd lips?

ALL THE GIRLS

A kiss! A kiss!

ALISOUN

Hold! Give the bride first licks.

ALL THE GIRLS

The bride!

ALISOUN

[*After kissing Chaucer.*]

Now, lasses, take your turns.

A GIRL

The shrew!

ALISOUN

Lo! what a pot of honey I have won
To lure the village butterflies. Come, pretties,
Sip, sip, and die o' jealousy.

A GIRL

[*To Chaucer.*]

Who is
This woman?

CHAUCER

Nymphs, this is the gentle Thisbe
That wooed and won me. Judge then, goddesses,
How I must weep to lose her.

ALISOUN

Lose me, love?
Nay, honey-pot, I am too stuck on thee.
Thy bosom is my hive, and I queen-bee.

A GIRL

I'd rather lose my heart to a ripe pumpkin.

ANOTHER

Or a green gourd.

[*They go off, in piqued laughter.*]

ALISOUN

[*Calls after them.*]

What devil doth it matter
Whether he be a pumpkin or a rose,
So be that he rings sound. — Give me the man
That keeps his old bark grafted with new buds
And lops away the dead wood from his trunk,
And I will hug him like the mistletoe.
Geoffrey, thou art the man.

CHAUCER

[*As Alisoun is about to embrace him, turns to the Man-of-Law.*]

Cold-blooded knave!
The flower of women and the wit of wives —
Yet I must lose her!

MAN-OF-LAW

Blame not me, sir; blame
The law.

CHAUCER

O heartless knave!

MAN-OF-LAW

By English law,
No woman may be wedded but five times.

ALISOUN

What's that?

CHAUCER

But is there no exception?

MAN-OF-LAW

None.
By law, sir, a sixth husband is proscribed.

ALISOUN

Hey, what! What devil? Say't again. I'm deef.

MAN-OF-LAW

By law, dame, a sixth husband is proscribed.

ALISOUN

Prescribed? Ho, then, art thou a doctor?

MAN-OF-LAW

No,
I am a sergeant-of-the-law. — "Proscribed"
Is to say, dame, "inhibited," "forbidden."

ALISOUN

How! you forbid me to take Geoffrey here
For my sixth husband?

CHAUCER

Nay, the law forbids it.

ALISOUN

Pish! What's the fine?

MAN-OF-LAW

To hang, dame, by the neck
Till thou art dead.

ALISOUN

Aye, man, by *Geoffrey's* neck.
Get out!

CHAUCER

Canst quote the law?

MAN-OF-LAW

The statute, sir,—
The forty-ninth doom of King Richard — saith :
"One woman to five men sufficeth," or
"Quid tibi placet mihi placet," sir.

ALISOUN

Hog-gibberish !

CHAUCER

[*Aside.*]

Nay, 'tis a man-of-law.
But soft ! we'll bribe him.

ALISOUN

[*Aside.*]

Do, duck.

CHAUCER

Sergeant — hist !

[*Whispers aside and gives him money, as if covertly. Then aloud.*]

This statute, is there no appeal from it ?

MAN-OF-LAW

A special dispensation from the king ;
That's all, sir.

ALISOUN

Break his head !

CHAUCER

Nay, Alis, here's
Good news. The king himself is here to-day
In Canterbury. I will beg him grant
This special dispensation for our marriage.

ALISOUN

Thou — ask the king?

CHAUCER

Why not?

ALISOUN

Give me a vintner
For cheek! Sweet duck, I do believe thou lov'st me.

[*Enter the Miller, with the other Swains.*]

CHAUCER

I am unworthy, love, to match thy wit.

MILLER

Thou art unworthy, fool, to latch her shoe.

CHAUCER

Even so.

MILLER

Thou likes to play the gentleman;
Come, then; I'll duel you.

CHAUCER

Good Bob, I love thee.

MILLER

Come: knives or fists?

CHAUCER

Kind Bob, thou shalt this day
Shed tears and vow I love thee.

MILLER

Wilt not fight?
Then —

ALISOUN

[*Intercepting a blow at Chaucer.*]

Hold there, Robin Sweetheart, art thou jealous?

MILLER

Aye, dame.

ALISOUN

What for?

MILLER

[*To Swains.*]

She axes me what for!
Axe her, who gagged the Knight?

SHIPMAN

Who tied the Squire?

MANCIPLE

Who watched in the wet cellar?

SUMMONER

Tied thy doublet?

FRIAR

Who stole thy scarlet cloak?

COOK

Who kissed thy toe?

MILLER

Axe her, what made us do all this? Mayhap
To get our backs flayed — what? Mayhap to make
Our wench a wedding with this vintner here?

SHIPMAN

Revenge!

FRIAR

Remember Peggy's stall.

[*They surround Chaucer threateningly.*]

COOK

Vile tub!

PRIORESS

[*Entering, left.*]

O Roderigo, help him!

KNIGHT

Whom? That churl!

SQUIRE

Father, let me!

KNIGHT

You are deceived in him.

SQUIRE

But, sir, these are the rogues that bound you.

KNIGHT

He

Is one of them. They are beneath our notice.

MANCIPLE

Death to the vintner!

SUMMONER

Hit him!

ALISOUN

Stand away!

CHAUCER

[*As Alisoun, with her fists, keeps them at bay.*]

Happy, bridegroom, be thy stars
When thy Venus turns to Mars!

[*Enter heralds.*]

HERALDS

Make way! Room for King Richard! Way! The King!

CLERK

[*In the crowd.*]

Shall we see Chaucer now?

PARSON

He's sure to come.

[*The heralds force back all the pilgrims, except those of high degree, showing, at the great door of the Cathedral, a procession of priests and choir-boys about to emerge.*]

PRIEST

Peace, folk! Stop wrangling. Kneel! His Reverence, Archbishop of Canterbury, meets the King.

PRIORESS

[*To Squire.*]

Chaucer, you say?

SQUIRE

A little patience more.

[*A silence falls on the pilgrims as, within the Cathedral, choir-boys begin to chant a hymn. Issuing from the*

door and forming against one side of the massed, kneeling pilgrims, enters a procession, headed by splendid-vested priests, carrying pictured banners of St. Thomas and his shrine, followed by choir-boys, and lastly, by the Archbishop of Canterbury with regalia.]

THE PROCESSION

[*Sings.*]

"Tu, per Thomæ sanguinem
Quem pro te impendit,
Fac nos, Christe, scandere
Quo Thomas ascendit.

[*Chants.*]

Gloria et honore coronasti eum Dɔmine
Et constituisti eum supra opera manuum tuarum
Ut ejus meritis et precibus a Gehennæ incendiis
liberemur."

[*At the climax of the chant, as the Archbishop appears in the doorway, the chimes of the Cathedral peal forth from high above the kneeling crowd; cheers, beginning from the right, swell to a tumult, and as the people rise, enter, right, King Richard on horseback, the Dukes of Lancaster, Gloucester, and Ireland on ponies, and their train, among whom are Wycliffe and Johanna on foot. Six mules, laden with offerings, bring up the rear. The shouts of "God save the King!" "God save John Gaunt!" etc., continue till the King and nobles descend from their steeds.*]

PILGRIMS

God save King Richard!

KING RICHARD

Thanks, good gaffers, thanks !

[*To John of Gaunt.*]

Sweet Uncle Jack, thou hast a spanking pony.
Take her to Spain with you, and all the Dons
Will kiss her fetlock. N'est ce pas, bel ami ?

DE VERE

They will, my Dick. Par charity ! Haha !

ARCHBISHOP

[*Saluting gravely.*]

God save your Majesty !

KING RICHARD

God save you, too !
Your Reverence is looking in fine feather.
Here are some trinkets for the holy martyr.
These mules bear spices from Arabia ;
These — tapers ; and these — Persian tapestries.
Here's a neat statue of myself in gold ;
And so, and so, so. —

[*To the Duke of Gloucester.*]

Pretty Uncle Tom,
I wish my ruffs were puckered like your brows.
Dost thou pick faults, eh ? in my Paris gown ?

GLOUCESTER

My liege, this is the shrine of holy Becket.

KING RICHARD

Lord, save our souls!

[*To De Vere.*]

Lend me a looking-glass.

DE VERE

[*Takes one from his sleeve.*]

Ha! Dick, par charity!

[*Richard and De Vere look in the glass and make faces in imitation of Gloucester and the others.*]

PARSON

[*In the crowd to the Clerk.*]

Yonder's the Duke

Of Lancaster: John Gaunt.

CHAUCER

[*Who has been held back with the crowd by the heralds, pushes through, and hastening forward, kneels to Johanna, who is talking with Wycliffe.*]

A boon! a boon!

JOHANNA

[*To Wycliffe.*]

Protect me, sir!

CHAUCER

[*Holds up Johanna's love-knot.*]

Lady, once more, your pledge!

JOHANNA

Unmannered loon!

A HERALD

[*Seizes Chaucer roughly by the shoulder.*]

Get back!

JOHN OF GAUNT

What, brother Geoffrey!

CHAUCER

Well met, old friend!

[*They embrace.*]

KING RICHARD

God's eyes! Our laureate.
Halloa there, Chaucer!

JOHANNA

Chaucer!

ALISOUN

Chaucer!

PRIORESS

Chaucer!

[*Chaucer bows to the King.*]

SQUIRE

[*To Knight.*]

Father, I said so.

GAUNT

You are late, my poet.
What make you here?

CHAUCER

Blunders, your Grace.

GAUNT

How, blunders?

CHAUCER

Taxing the memory of a gracious lady.

JOHANNA

Signor, the place of fool I should have sued
For you, hath been already filled — by me.
I crave your pardon.

CHAUCER

And I kiss your hand.

KING RICHARD

Ho, Chaucer!

ALISOUN

[*Struggling with a herald.*]
Let me out!

CHAUCER

Your Majesty?

KING RICHARD

When April comes, there's not a man in England
But thinks on thee and love. While thou art England's
And England Richard's, thou art Richard's own.

[*As the King embraces Chaucer, Alisoun breaks away from the herald.*]

ALISOUN

Hold up, your Majesty! The man is mine.

KING RICHARD

What's this?

CHAUCER

My liege — another blunder.

[*Chaucer whispers aside to the Man-of-Law.*]

KING RICHARD

So?
The blunder was not God's in making her.

ALISOUN

The man is mine.

KING RICHARD

What, Geoffrey, art thou tripped?
Have love and April overflowed thy verse
To fill thy veins?

CHAUCER

Your Majesty —

MAN-OF-LAW

[*Aside to John of Gaunt.*]

Dan Chaucer
Bid me explain to you —

[*They talk aside.*]

CHAUCER

Your Majesty,
This is that fair-reputed fay, Queen Mab,
Who, having met amid the woods of Kent,
Hath so enamoured me, as you have said,
With love and April, that — to speak it short —
We are betrothed.

KING RICHARD

Betrothed!

DE VERE

Par charity!

MILLER

[*To a herald, who restrains him.*]

Leave go!

GAUNT

[*Aside to Man-of-Law.*]

A miller?

MAN-OF-LAW

[*Aside:*]

Yes, that fellow there.

ALISOUN

[*Nudging Chaucer.*]

Speak on, sweet chuck.

CHAUCER

"Betrothed," your Majesty:
'Tis a sweet word which lovers' law hath hallow'd,
But which your law, King Richard, hath envenom'd.
"No woman may be wedded but five times:"
Thus saith the law.

KING RICHARD

What! Where?

GAUNT

[*Laughingly aside.*]

My liege!

[*They whisper.*]

CHAUCER

And so,
Because this queen of wives hath scarce been knit
Five times in wedlock, therefore — saith the law —
Our bosoms must be sundered.

MILLER

[*In the crowd.*]

God be praised!

CHAUCER

But knowing, King, how nobly wit and mercy
Are mixed in your complexion, I presume
To ask your greatness to outleap your laws
And grant, by special dispensation, to
This woman — a sixth husband.

KING RICHARD

By my fay, sir,
You ask too much. My laws are sacred.

[*Aside to John of Gaunt, who whispers him.*]

Hein?

ALISOUN

Dig him again there, Geoffrey.

CHAUCER

King, have grace!

KING RICHARD

The Duke of Lancaster advises me
There may be one exception.

[*Aside.*]

What? What's that?

[*Aloud.*]

But only one. My law is sacred. — Woman,
I grant to thee the right to wed once more
On *one* condition. Mark it; thy sixth husband
Must be a miller. — Herald, sound the verdict.

[*As the herald blares his trumpet, Alisoun shakes her fist at Chaucer, who eyes her slily; then both burst into laughter.*]

HERALD

If any miller here desire this woman,
Now let him claim her.

MILLER

[*Rushes up.*]

Here, by Corpus bones!

ALISOUN

Thou sweet pig's eye! I take thee.

[*Extending her hand to Chaucer.*]

Geoffrey, quits!

CHAUCER

Quits, Alisoun!

FRIAR

[*Bobbing up between them.*]

Et moi?

ALISOUN

Et toi.

[*Kisses him.*]

MILLER

[*Grabbing him.*]

Hold, friar!
That pays thee to perform the ceremony.

KING RICHARD

[*Seated, to Chaucer.*]

Come now, our prodigal Ulysses! Tell us;
What dark adventures have befallen thee since
Thou settest forth from Priam-Bailey's castle?
What inland Circe witched our laureate
To mask his Muse among this porkish rabble?

CHAUCER

My liege, may I have leave to tell you bluntly?

KING RICHARD

Carte blanche, carte blanche, mon cher. I'll be as mute
As e'er King Alcinous i' the Odyssey.

CHAUCER

My Muse went masked, King Richard, from your court
To learn a roadside rhyme. Shall I repeat it?

KING RICHARD

Carte blanche, j'ai dit. Say on!

CHAUCER

Your Majesty,

"When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?"

MILLER

By Corpus bones!

KING RICHARD

[*Starts up.*]

Mort Dieu!

CHAUCER

"Carte blanche," my liege!
Six years ago in London, when the mob
Roared round your stirrups, Wat the Tyler laid
His hand upon your bridle. "Sacrilege!"
Cried the Lord Mayor, and Wat Tyler fell
Dead.

[*The crowd murmurs.*]

GLOUCESTER

[*To Richard, remonstratingly.*]

Nephew!

[*The King, sitting again, motions Gloucester silence.*]

CHAUCER

Whereat you, your Majesty —
God save you, a mere boy, a gallant boy —
Cried out: "Good fellows, have you lost your captain?
I am your King, and I will be your captain."

[*The pilgrims cheer.*]

Have you forgotten how they cheered? Then hark!
Once more that "porkish rabble" you shall hear
Make music sweeter than your laureate's odes.

[*Turning to the crowd.*]

Pilgrims and friends, deep-hearted Englishmen,
This is your King who called himself your captain.

PILGRIMS

[*Shout.*]

God save the King!

CHAUCER

My liege, my dear young liege,
Are these the dull grunts of the swinish herd,
Or are they singing hearts of Englishmen?
Where is *the gentleman*, whose ermined throat
Shall strain a nobler shout? "When Adam delved"—
Sire, Adam's sons are delving still, and he
Who scorns to set his boot-heel to the spade
Is but a bastard.

KING RICHARD

[*Jumps up again.*]

'Swounds!

PILGRIMS

God save Dan Chaucer!

KING RICHARD

[*To Chaucer.*]

Give me thy hand. God's eyes! These knaves cheer you
Louder than me. Go tell the churls I love 'em.

CHAUCER

[*To the pilgrims.*]

His Majesty bids me present you all
Before him, as his fellow Englishmen.

KING RICHARD

[*As the pilgrims approach.*]

Fellows, God bless you!

[*To Chaucer.*]

Thanks.

[*Snatching away his looking-glass from the hand of De Vere, who is making a comic face at Chaucer, he smashes it upon the ground.*]

DE VERE

Sweet Dick!

ARCHBISHOP

My liege,
The holy canopy is being raised.

[*A medley of sweet bells is heard from within the Cathedral. The pilgrims crowd about Chaucer.*]

CHAUCER

Give me your hands, my friends. You hear the bells
Which call us to the holy martyr's shrine.
Give me your hands, dear friends; and so farewell:
You, honest parson — sly Bob — testy Jack —
Gentle Sir Knight — bold Roger — Master Franklin —
All, all of you! — Call me your vintner still,
And I will brew you such a vintage as
Not all the saps that mount to nature's sun
Can match in April magic. They who drink it —
Yes, though it be after a thousand years,
When this our shrine, which like the Pleiades
Now glitters, shall be bare and rasèd stone,
And this fresh pageant mildewed history —

Yet they who drink the vintage I will brew
Shall wake, and see a vision, in their wine,
Of Canterbury and our pilgrimage:
These very faces, with the blood in them,
Laughter and love and tang of life in them,
These moving limbs, this rout, this majesty!
For by that resurrection of the Muse,
Shall you, sweet friends, re-met in timeless Spring,
Pace on through time upon eternal lines
And ride with Chaucer in his pilgrimage.

[*A deep bell sounds.*]

ARCHBISHOP

My liege, St. Thomas will receive his pilgrims.

[*The King, lords, and people, forming in procession, begin to move toward the entrance of the Cathedral.*]

CHAUCER

[*To Prioress.*]

Madame, will you walk in with me?

PRIORESS

Monsieur,
If you will offer this at Thomas' shrine.

CHAUCER

Your brooch!

PRIORESS

Our brooch.

CHAUCER

When shall we meet again?

PRIORESS

Do you forget our star?

CHAUCER

Forget our star!
Not while the memory of beauty pains
And *Amor vincit omnia.*

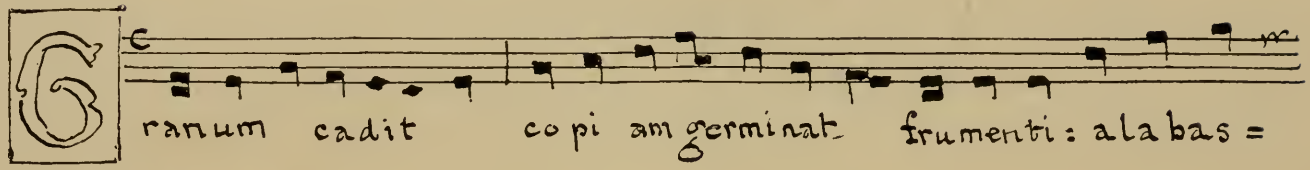
[*The heralds blare their trumpets; the priests swing their censers; the choir-boys, slowly entering the Cathedral, chant their hymn to St. Thomas, in which all the pilgrims join. Just as Chaucer and the Prioress are about to enter, the curtain falls.*]

Explicit pars quarta.

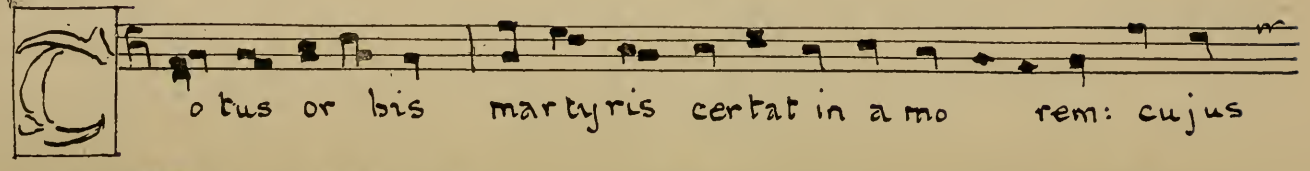
FINIS.

℣ In laudibus. Añna.

Añna.



Añna.



Añna.

in lac semel transiit quater in cru o rem. ℣. De' de' me'

Aña

d tho me me mo ri am quater lux descendit: et

in sancti gloriam cereos accen- dit. ℣. Benedicite

Aña.

u per thome sanguinẽ quem pro te impendit fac

nos christe scandere quo thomas ascen dit. ℣. Laudate

ADDENDA

1. The accompanying reproduction of the original Hymn to St. Thomas, of which the last verse only is sung by the pilgrims in Act IV, is authentic in words and music.

The author is sincerely indebted to Professor Kittredge, of Harvard University, for tracing and securing, through the various courtesies of Mr. Albert Matthews (of Boston), Mr. Frank Kidson (of Leeds), Mr. J. E. Matthew (of S. Hampstead, London), and Mr. Wilson (of the British Museum Library), a copy of this almost inaccessible document.

The words are taken from Vol. 13, p. 240, of Dreves' "Collection of Sequences and Latin Hymns." The music is copied from the "Sarum Antiphonal" of 1519.

In regard to the music, Mr. Wilson writes: "Each of these Antiphons (*i.e.* each verse of the hymn) is sung once before, and once after, each psalm. Here there are five; and at the end of each is the catch-word of the psalm. The first is '*Dominus regnavit*'; the second, '*Jubilate*,' and so on."

Mr. J. E. Matthew writes: "The catchword is not sufficient, in every case, to identify the psalm, but I have indicated all the psalms having such beginnings.[1]

[1] The psalms, as indicated by Mr. Matthew, are as follows: Beginning *Deus regnavit*, xxiii, xcix; *Jubilate*, c, lxvi; *Deus, Deus, meus*, xxii, lxiii; *Benedicite*, The Song of the Three Children? (Apocrypha.) *Laudate*, cxiii, cxvii, cxxxiv, cxlvii, cxlviii.

The lines 'Gloria et honore coronasti,' etc. (part, of course, of the 8th Psalm: 'Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour'), form no part of the service in the 'Sarum Antiphonal.'"

2. For valuable information and advice regarding the chronology of the "Canterbury Tales" as affecting this play, the author also gives sincere thanks to his friend, Mr. John S. P. Tatlock, of the University of Michigan.

3. The following dates will reveal certain anachronisms in the text of his play, which the writer, for dramatic purposes, has ignored: —

Oct. 1, 1386: Chaucer was elected Knight of the Shire for Kent, which office he still held in April, 1387.

Dec. 31, 1384: Wycliffe died.

1386: John of Gaunt left England for Castile.

4. According to Chaucer scholars, the third wife of John of Gaunt was probably a sister of Chaucer's wife. Upon this probability, though it could not have been a fact until after 1387, the author bases his dramatic license of referring to Chaucer and the Duke of Lancaster as brothers-in-law.

PERCY MACKAYE.

NEW YORK, March, 1903.

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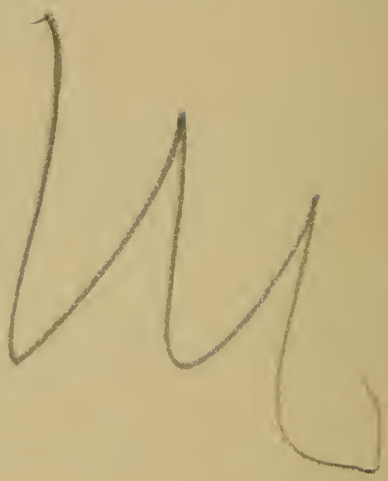

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